# The God of Small Things

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARUNDHATI ROY

Roy's father was a Hindu tea plantation manager and her mother was a Syrian Christian women's rights activist. Her parents divorced when she was two, and Roy moved with her mother and brother (who was only a few months older than she was) to Kerala, the setting of *The God of Small Things*. Roy studied architecture in Delhi, India, and then acted in several independent films, and later married filmmaker Pradip Krishen. *The God of Small Things* is her first and only novel, but it immediately became an international success and Roy was awarded the Booker Prize in 1997. Since then Roy has written many nonfiction essays and has become an outspoken critic of the Indian government, the United States, and global policies of imperialism, capitalism, and nuclear war. She currently lives in Delhi and is working on a second novel.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The God of Small Things* takes place mostly in 1969 and 1993, in Ayemenem (Aymanam), in the district of Kerala. Marxist ideas grew popular in Kerala soon after India's liberation from British colonial rule, and in 1967 the Naxalite party split off as a more radical Communist group than the mainstream. The growing social unrest from these labor movements affects the action of the early novel. The ancient Hindu caste system (dividing Untouchables from Touchables, among other rules) was abolished around 1950, but many Indians still clung to old traditions and the class divide. Some of the characters in the novel are also Syrian Christians, an ancient community in Kerala originating with St. Thomas.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Roy often denies the influence of Salman Rushdie on her work, but he is a famous British Indian contemporary writer (famous for *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*) whose style is similar to Roy's. In the text of *The God of Small Things*, Roy references such diverse works as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The God of Small Things*
- **When Written:** 1992-1996
- **Where Written:** Delhi, India
- **When Published:** 1997
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Indian Literature
- **Genre:** Literary Fiction, Family Drama
- **Setting:** Ayemenem, Kerala, India
- **Climax:** Sophie Mol dies and Velusha is beaten
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, free indirect discourse

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Sound of Music.** As a child, Roy's family also made several car journeys to see *The Sound of Music*, as it was one of the few English films available. Roy says she didn't like the movie much, but the pilgrimage to see it was "like going to church or something."

**Activism.** Since the publication of *The God of Small Things* and her subsequent fame, Roy has become an outspoken activist on many issues in India and throughout the world. Her opposition to a dam project in India even landed her in jail for a single "symbolic" day.

## PLOT SUMMARY

The events of *The God of Small Things* are revealed in a fragmentary manner, mostly jumping back and forth between scenes in 1969 and 1993, with backstory scattered throughout. The story centers around the wealthy, land-owning, Syrian Christian Ipe family of Ayemenem, a town in Kerala, India. Most of the plot occurs in 1969, focusing on the seven-year-old twins Estha and Rahel, who live with their mother Ammu, their grandmother Mammachi, their uncle Chacko, and their great-aunt Baby Kochamma.

In the backstory before 1969, Mammachi was married to Pappachi, an Imperial Entomologist who beat her cruelly. By 1969 Pappachi is dead and Mammachi is blind. Behind her house is the Meenachal River and her pickle factory, Paradise Pickles & Preserves. Baby Kochamma is a bitter, jealous old woman who unrequitedly loved an Irish missionary. Chacko went to Oxford and married Margaret Kochamma, an English woman. They had a daughter, Sophie Mol, and then Margaret left Chacko for a man named Joe. Chacko returned to Ayemenem and took over the pickle factory. Ammu married Baba, trying to escape Ayemenem, but Baba turned out to be an abusive alcoholic. After the twins were born the two separated and Ammu moved back to Ayemenem. In the wider society of Kerala, the Communist Party is gaining power and threatens to overthrow landlords like the Ipes. The Ipes live near an Untouchable (an inferior caste) family that includes

Velutha, a young man who works for Chacko and is beloved by the twins.

The main action centers around Sophie Mol's visit to Ayemenem. Joe dies in an accident, and Chacko invites Margaret Kochamma to Ayemenem for the holidays. Estha, Rahel, Ammu, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma make a trip to the airport, and on the way their car is trapped by a Communist march. The family then goes to see *The Sound of Music*, and Estha is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, a vendor at the theater. The next day Sophie and Margaret arrive, and the family returns to Ayemenem.

Estha fears that the Orangedrink Man will come for him, so he and Rahel find a boat and row across the river to the "History House," the abandoned home of an Englishman who "went native." The twins set up a hideout there. Meanwhile Ammu dreams about Velutha, and that night she and Velutha meet by the river and have sex. They continue to meet every night for the next two weeks.

Finally Vellya Paapen (Velutha's father) comes to Mammachi and confesses his son's relationship with Ammu. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma lock Ammu in her room, where she screams that the twins are "millstones" around her neck. The twins decide to run away to the History House, and Sophie Mol comes with them. Their boat tips over as they cross the river and Sophie Mol drowns. The twins reach shore and, terrified, fall asleep in the History House, unaware that Velutha is there too.

Baby Kochamma goes to the police, telling Inspector Thomas Mathew that Velutha tried to rape Ammu and kidnapped the children. Six policemen find Velutha and beat him brutally in front of Estha and Rahel. When Mathew finds out that Velutha is innocent, he threatens to charge Baby Kochamma. Terrified for herself, she convinces Estha to "save Ammu" by telling the police that Velutha killed Sophie Mol. Velutha dies in jail that night. After Sophie Mol's funeral Baby Kochamma convinces Chacko to throw Ammu out of the house, and Ammu is then forced to "return" Estha to Baba.

The twins are separated for twenty-three years, during which Estha stops speaking altogether. When he is thirty-one Baba "re-returns" him to Ayemenem. Meanwhile Rahel is kicked out of many schools, and Ammu dies when Rahel is eleven. Rahel marries an American and lives in Boston, but then gets divorced and returns to Ayemenem when she hears Estha is there.

The twins are reunited in 1993. Mammachi has died and Baby Kochamma and the cook, Kochu Maria, spend all day watching TV as the house falls apart. The History House has become a five-star hotel. Rahel and Estha (who still doesn't speak) sift through some old trinkets and notebooks and end up reaffirming their closeness by having sex.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Rahel Ipe** – One of the twins and protagonists of the novel, Rahel is an energetic, imaginative girl. She and Estha are so close as to almost consider themselves one person, though their appearances and personalities are different. After Rahel is separated from Estha, she drifts from school to school and then job to job, lost without her other half. She eventually marries Larry McCaslin and moves to America, but she and Larry are divorced when Rahel's "Emptiness" becomes too much. When she is thirty-one Rahel returns to Ayemenem to see Estha again.

**Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha)** – The other twin and protagonist, Estha is more serious and well-behaved than Rahel, and he also experiences more of the harshness of the world at an early age. Estha is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and then lives in fear that he will be molested again. It is then Estha who must betray Velutha to his face, so he cannot hide in the fantasies that Rahel allows herself. After Ammu's scandal Estha is "returned" to live with his alcoholic father Baba, and Estha soon stops speaking entirely or even acknowledging other people. After twenty-three years Baba "re-returns" him to Ayemenem and Estha and Rahel are reunited.

**Ammu** – The mother of the twins, an independent woman who is both a loving mother and has an "unsafe edge." Ammu was beaten cruelly by Pappachi as a child, so she grew up with a natural distrust of patriarchal Indian society. She married Baba to escape Ayemenem, but he was an abusive alcoholic so Ammu left him after the twins were born. Ammu is then disgraced because of her divorce, and she causes a huge scandal by having an affair with the untouchable Velutha. After Sophie Mol's death Ammu "returns" Estha to Baba, as she can't afford to keep both twins. Ammu dies of a lung disease four years later, alone in a lodge.

**Navomi Ipe (Baby Kochamma)** – Pappachi's younger sister, a staunch Syrian Christian who loves Father Mulligan when she is young. Baby Kochamma then grows into a bitter, jealous woman who betrays Ammu and the twins to save herself. When she is old she spends all day watching TV while the house falls apart around her.

**Chacko Ipe** – Ammu's brother, who received all the privilege that Ammu was denied. Chacko went to Oxford and became a Rhodes Scholar. While in London he married Margaret Kochamma, but she left him after their daughter, Sophie Mol, was born. Chacko then returns to Ayemenem and takes over Paradise Pickles. Though Chacko supports Marxism, in practice he acts as a typical landlord with traditional caste prejudices.

**Velutha** – A Paravan (Untouchable) who grew up with Ammu and is very skilled with his hands. He is an excellent carpenter and fixes all the machines in the pickle factory, but is still

treated as second-class. He grows into a handsome young man and is beloved by the twins. His affair with Ammu, betrayal, and brutal death make up much of the novel's tragedy.

**Shri Benaan John Ipe (Pappachi)** – Mammachi's husband, an Imperial Entomologist who discovered a new species of moth but then didn't have it named after him. This haunts him ever after, and Pappachi grows angry and cruel later in life. He viciously beats Mammachi and Ammu, all while acting like a kind husband and father in public.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mammachi** – The mother of Chacko and Ammu, a violinist and pickle-maker who sees the world in strict divisions of class, wealth, and caste. She endures Pappachi's violence without complaint, but after Chacko stops Pappachi, Mammachi comes to love Chacko with an almost sexual love.

**Sophie Mol** – The daughter of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, Sophie is beloved by all the Ipes because of her whiteness and beauty. The twins befriend her for the short period before her death. Her visit is the setting for most of the novel's action.

**Margaret Kochamma** – Chacko's English wife and Sophie Mol's mother. Her parents don't approve of her marriage to Chacko, and she later leaves him for Joe.

**Kochu Maria** – The cook of the Ipe family, an extremely short, bad-tempered woman who comes to share in Baby Kochamma's TV addiction.

**Vellya Paapen** – Velutha's father, an Untouchable with a glass eye that the Ipes paid for. Though he loves his son, he is willing to kill Velutha to fulfill his social obligation.

**Comrade K. N. M. Pillai** – The ambitious leader of the Communist Party in Ayemenem. He is an opportunistic man who prints labels for Chacko's pickle factory while also trying to convince Chacko's laborers to revolt.

**Baba** – The father of Rahel and Estha, and ex-husband of Ammu. After marrying him, Ammu learns that he is an alcoholic and compulsive liar. He tries to prostitute Ammu to his boss in order to keep his job and later grows abusive, and then Ammu leaves with the children.

**Inspector Thomas Mathew** – A police inspector of Kerala who sends the officers to beat Velutha. When it seems like Velutha might be innocent, he tells Baby Kochamma's that the twins will have to implicate Velutha or else he will charge Baby with the crime.

**The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man** – An ugly older man who works in the movie theater and molests Estha.

**Kuttapen** – Velutha's paralyzed brother.

**Lenin Pillai** – Comrade Pillai's son.

**Father Mulligan** – An Irish missionary that Baby Kochamma loves unrequitedly. He comes to India to refute Hinduism, but ends up becoming a Hindu himself.

**Larry McCaslin** – Rahel's ex-husband from Boston.

**Joe** – The man Margaret Kochamma leaves Chacko for. He dies in an accident.

**Urumban** – Not a real character, a twin that Velutha invents to pretend he wasn't in the Communist march, and that the twins then use to avoid thinking about Velutha's death.

**Kari Saipu** – An Englishman who "went native" and lived in the "History House."

**Reverend E. John Ipe (Punnyan Kunju)** – The father of Baby Kochamma and Pappachi, a minister who was famous for having been blessed by the Patriarch of Antioch.

**Dr. Verghese Verghese** – A doctor who treats children and sexually harasses their mothers.

**Miss Mitten** – Baby Kochamma's Australian missionary friend who dislikes the twins.

**Murlidharan** – An insane man who sits on a milestone, counting his keys.

**Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad** – The leader of the Communist Party in Kerala.

**Kochu Thomban** – The Ayemenem temple elephant.

**Mrs. Pillai** – The wife of Comrade Pillai. She is beautiful, and dutiful and obedient to her husband.

**Latha** – Comrade Pillai's niece.

**Ousa** – A night watchmen at the Paradise Pickle's factory.

# THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

## FAMILY AND SOCIAL OBLIGATION

*The God of Small Things* basically deals with the complicated relationships between members of the Ipe family in Ayemenem, India. Each family member has different factors weighing on their relationships, like social obligation, familial duty, and personal dislike. Baby Kochamma, one of the book's most negative characters, allows her personal grudges and preoccupation with society's approval to lead her to betray her own family. Outside of the Ipes, Vellya Paapen also chooses his duty to society over familial love when he offers to kill his son, the Untouchable Velutha, for sleeping with Ammu. It is this tension between internal love and social obligations that makes up most of the novel's conflict.

The most important relationship of the book is between the twins Estha and Rahel and their mother, Ammu. The twins see themselves as almost one person, and their closeness is a shelter from the harsh political and social forces of their world. The twins' relationship with Ammu is also very complex, as Ammu is both a loving mother and an unpredictable woman who sometimes says and does things that hurt her children deeply. The very existence of the twins in her current state of divorce is also a disgrace for Ammu in Indian society. Mammachi deals with social and personal issues with her children as well, as she loves Chacko with a repressed sexuality and forgives his affairs, but disowns Ammu when Ammu sleeps with an Untouchable. Familial love is always struggling with society and duty in the novel, and it is rarely victorious.

## INDIAN POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND CLASS

The members of the Ipe family deal with a variety of social and political influences that cause much internal and external struggle in the novel. In the larger society of Kerala, India (in the 1969 portion of the novel), Marxist ideas have taken root and begin to upset the class system of landlords and laborers. This directly affects Paradise Pickles and the characters of Velutha, Chacko, and Comrade Pillai. The ancient Hindu caste system is another important factor – this system was officially abolished years earlier, but it still remains strongly imprinted on the minds of the public. The "Love Laws" of the caste system are of particular significance, particularly the divide between Touchables and Untouchables (a caste seen as vastly inferior).

Most of the Ipe family is also "Syrian Christian," and Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in particular use their faith to justify many of their actions. Estha and Rahel, who are half-Hindu, half-Syrian Christian, must then struggle with this conflicting identity. The gender double standard of Indian society is another large factor in the plot, as Pappachi and Chacko's sins are generally overlooked, while Ammu is disgraced and scorned for being divorced. Overall, the "small things" that occur between the characters of the novel serve as a microcosm for the "big things" happening throughout India, as many political and social forces struggle against each other and the country leans towards violence and unrest.

## LOVE AND SEXUALITY

Love comes in many forms in *The God of Small Things*, but it is most important when it crosses divides of society and duty. The relationship between Estha and Rahel is the strongest of the book, as the two are so close as to almost consider themselves one person. Yet when the young Rahel lists the people she loves she does not include Estha, but instead those she is "supposed" to love according to familial duty. Roy emphasizes the "Love Laws" early and often, foreshadowing the importance she will give to love that crosses boundaries of society and tradition. The central example of this is Ammu's relationship with Velutha, an Untouchable. This relationship is horrifying to the community and leads to Velutha's death and Ammu's exile, but it is also the most positive example of romantic love in the novel.

Unfortunately, love and sexuality often take on more violent and oppressive forms, as Mammachi is beaten by her husband and Estha is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Roy ends the novel with Estha and Rahel's incestuous union after they are reunited, followed by Ammu's first sexual encounter with Velutha. The poetic descriptions and juxtaposition of these scenes against violence and death gives them greater impact, and through them Roy shows that love can cross divides of politics and hatred. Even though such love can lead to tragedy, it is still incredibly valuable.



## CHANGE VS. PRESERVATION

Many characters try to preserve old memories and traditions in the novel, but Roy also portrays the inevitable march of change through small shifts in the status quo. Paradise Pickles & Preserves is the most obvious symbol of preservation (pickling things to preserve them), as Mammachi and the people of Ayemenem cling to the old caste system and the gender double standard. In places like Mammachi's house and the "History House" things linger from the past and are nursed and kept alive, like the "Loss of Sophie Mol" or the ghost of Kari Saipu. Other than through its name, the History House also becomes a symbol of preservation as the resting place of Rahel's plastic watch with the time painted on it – a small example of literally freezing time.

Despite these attempts at preservation, the pickle jars keep leaking, and one of the book's common refrains is "things can change in a day." Much of the action takes place in two days, one in 1969 and one in 1993 – the days of Sophie Mol's death and Rahel's reunion with Estha. The efforts to preserve tradition are eroded away, and change still comes to both characters and country through the "small things." Ammu gets divorced and then loves an Untouchable, defying gender roles and the caste system, and the Marxist movement gains power and overturns the system of landlords and laborers. Small things like Ammu's warning that she loves Rahel "a little less" lead to big events like Rahel and Estha running away, which in turn leads to Sophie Mol's death.

## SMALL THINGS

In both the novel's title and in her writing style, Roy emphasizes the small moments, objects, and changes that symbolize and lead to the "Big Things" in life, like death, love, and political upheaval. Much of *The God of Small Things* is written in a kind of free indirect discourse, a style where the third-person narrator partly perceives the

world in the childlike way that young Estha and Rahel do. This leads to many words written oddly (like "Bar Nowl" or "Locusts Stand I") but also to an emphasis on the innocent way a child sees the world, focusing on certain images and words. Through this lens, Roy dwells on small things like Rahel's watch, Estha's "Two Thoughts," and the little Marxist flag instead of straightforwardly describing the plot of the story.

Within the narrative itself, Roy often points out that small talk is a mask for large, hidden feelings. The most important example of this is in Ammu and Velusha's relationship at the end of the book. Instead of speaking of the huge taboo they are breaking or the impossibility of their future, the two lovers focus on the bugs in the jungle around them and look no farther than "tomorrow." While the "Big Things" eventually reveal themselves, it is the small things of the novel that make the story so poignant and human, and Roy's writing style so intimate.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### PAPPACHI'S MOTH

The actual moth was an insect that Pappachi discovered while he was Imperial Entomologist, and he believed it to be a new species. Later in his life, other lepidopterists decided that the moth actually was a new species, but they didn't name it after Pappachi and he considers this the greatest failure of his life. The narrator muses that this moth has haunted the family ever since, beginning with Pappachi's bursts of rage and domestic abuse. In the present day of the novel, Pappachi's moth becomes an eerie symbol of fear and unhappiness, particularly for Rahel. When something bad happens she feels the moth with "unusually dense dorsal tufts" land on her heart, and when she feels safer or more loved the moth lets go for a while.

### PARADISE PICKLES & PRESERVES

The pickle factory next to the Ipe house becomes a plot point as its laborers flirt with Marxism and rebellion, but the pickles themselves are symbolic of the theme of preservation. Pickling the fruits and vegetables is essentially preserving them so they last forever, just like the Ipe family tries to preserve the past – notably the memory of Sophie Mol's death and the old divides between landlords and laborers, Touchables and Untouchables. Within the pickle factory itself, the banana jam Mammachi makes is also symbolic, as banana jam is illegal to sell because it cannot be properly categorized as either jam or jelly. Rahel compares this to much of the family's conflict, as lines of religion and caste are blurred and this confusion of categories leads to tragedy.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *The God of Small Things* published in 1998.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined. Over the years, as the memory of Sophie Mol... slowly faded, the Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like a fruit in season. Every season.

**Related Characters:** Sophie Mol

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

The first chapter of *The God of Small Things*jumps backwards and forwards in time, mostly focusing on the reunion of the twins Estha and Rahel after decades of separation—and the rest of the book will largely be about what caused that separation. By starting in the "present" and jumping back into the past, Roy builds up the novel's theme of change and preservation, notably by highlighting which things are preserved over the years and which things change. And in this passage, it's clear that "the Loss of Sophie Mol" is something that his been perfectly preserved.

Note that "the Loss of Sophie Mol" is capitalized, as if it has become a character in itself, apart from the real person of Sophie Mol. Roy uses this kind of capitalization often, partly to show how "small things" take on large significance in a child's view of the world, and partly to emphasize and even characterize those same small things. This particular instance also shows how Sophie Mol's "Loss" has become more important than Sophie Mol herself—this family is more about fragmentation than togetherness, more about loss than love. More broadly, Roy is also basically beginning the story with its conclusion; what is arguably the tragic climax, Sophie Mol's death, is foreshadowed from the start.

> He didn't know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that *personal* despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the narrative moves quickly around in the first chapter, Roy gives us a brief overview of Rahel's adult life leading up to her return to Ayemenem. At college in Delhi, Rahel met and married Larry McCaslin, an American, and then moved with him to Boston. As is described in this passage, Larry eventually leaves Rahel because he cannot understand her detachment and depression. Roy emphasizes here that Rahel's personal struggles (here seemingly personified as "Small God," an echo of the "small things" of the title) reflect the turmoil of India itself (the howling "Big God"), as within the country "various kinds of despair competed for primacy." Furthermore, Rahel's despair is increased by the thought that for an Indian, "personal despair could never be desperate enough." This shows Rahel's lifelong guilt and pessimism, and is also an early example of a theme Roy brings up again and again: "small things" (like objects, moments, names) both echoing and encapsulating "big things" (like historical or social forces, love, hatred).

> They used to make pickles, squashes, jams, curry powders and canned pineapples. And banana jam (illegally) after the FPO (Food Products Organization) banned it because according to their specifications it was neither jam nor jelly. Too thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency, they said… Looking back now, to Rahel it seemed as though this difficulty that their family had with classification ran much deeper than the jam-jelly question… They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the narrative present, Rahel, who has returned to Ayemenem, looks out at her family's old pickle factory and ruminates on its significance. This passage is a good description of how Paradise Pickles & Preserves acts as an important symbol in the novel.

On the simplest level, pickling things is about preserving them, and as Roy has already shown, many things are preserved for years in Ayemenem and the Ipe household (most notably "the Loss of Sophie Mol"). The symbol is complicated, however, with the mention of the illegal banana jam—which is illegal because it can't be defined as strictly jam or jelly. This absurd and humorous fact becomes significant to Rahel in hindsight, as it brings up ideas of breaking boundaries, and shows how far society will go to maintain the status quo: even banning a food just because it doesn't fit into a convenient category. This "small thing" then connects to the "big thing" of love: "who should be loved and how...and how much," a phrase repeated many times in the novel, and one that will become much more important later on.

> Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for.
> Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

The novel's first chapter is a rather confusing collection of small moments and descriptions, and here the chapter ends with a list of actual small things—objects that seem

meaningless by themselves, but when taken together become "the bleached bones of a story." Ultimately, this is a good preview of Roy's writing style in general.

The passage also introduces the idea that "things can change in a day," a concept crucial to the structure of the novel itself. The book mostly takes place over the course of two days—one in 1969, and one in 1993. This, then, is another "small thing," as the events of one day can affect many years afterwards. And the fact that the day's significance hinges on "change" suggests that despite the family's attempts at preservation, drastic changes have taken place.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day. To use by night the boat that her children used by day. The boat that Estha sat on, and Rahel found.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Ammu, Velutha

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

Here the narrator describes Ammu, the mother of the twins and one of the novel's central characters. Ammu has a seeming contradiction at the core of her very being—she has both "the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber." It is this contradictory nature that makes her such an intriguing character, but that also brings tragedy, particularly for her children (who depend on her "tenderness of motherhood"). As the novel will explore later, it's also suggested that Ammu's contradictions are seen as an affront to the status quo in her society. Women are not supposed to be "unsafe" or "unpredictable," to express their sexuality and "love by night," and it is this "Unsafe Edge" that brings about Ammu's downfall. Roy also introduces more small things here, repeating phrases in a childlike manner (particularly about the boat) while also hinting at tragedy to come.

❝ The marchers that day were party workers, students and the laborers themselves. Touchables and Untouchables. On their shoulders they carried a keg of ancient anger, lit with a recent fuse. There was an edge to this anger that was Naxalite, and new.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

In the 1963 portion of the narrative, the Ipes make a "pilgrimage" to go see the movie *The Sound of Music* (and pick up Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma afterwards). On the way, their car is stopped by a political protest: a march of Naxalites, a more radical wing of the Communist Party in India.

As Roy describes here, the anger the marchers carry is "ancient," directed not just at the wealthy landowners, but also at the caste system (as exemplified by the description of Touchables and Untouchables marching together) and a general sense of injustice. The anger is ancient, but this march has an "edge" that is new, and associated with the Naxalite movement. Chacko is himself a wealthy landowner, but as an academic he also likes to play at being a Communist—yet the Naxalites threaten the very basis of the old order, and thus Chacko's position of privilege and power.

❝ Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Mammachi, Shri Benaan John Ipe (Pappachi)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

The character of Velutha first appears at the Naxalite march, briefly glimpsed by Rahel. The narrator then discusses the "Untouchable" caste, of which Velutha is a

member (as a Paravan). The caste system, which divided classes of people into a rigid religious and social hierarchy based on birth, was officially abolished in 1950, but in many parts of India it still existed in all but the letter of the law at the time the novel is set.

Tellingly, it's Mammachi, the oldest remaining family member and "preserver" of pickles, who remembers the more rigid and oppressive traditions of the past. She and Baby Kochamma, then, go on to uphold these social divisions later in the novel, even when the human cost is tragically high.

"Stop posing as the children's Great Savior!" Ammu said. "When it comes down to brass tacks, you don't give a damn about them. Or me."
"Should I?" Chacko said. "Are they *my* responsibility?"
He said that Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck.

**Related Characters:** Ammu, Chacko Ipe (speaker), Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

In an argument in the car, Chacko defends the twins from Ammu's anger, and in response Ammu lashes out at her brother, accusing him of hypocrisy. And indeed, as the only man in a relatively wealthy family, Chacko is the most privileged member of the Ipes. He has the freedom to play at being a Marxist or a sympathetic uncle, but doesn't have to face any real responsibilities or consequences because of these positions—he can use the jargon of Marxism with his workers while still exploiting them and retaining his wealth and power, and he can be kind to the twins when it's convenient for him, without having to really take care of them or sacrifice anything of himself.

In tragic contrast to Chacko's casual attitude towards his sister, nephew, and niece, Estha and Rahel truly desire Chacko's love. Thus they are presumably very hurt (though the narrator tellingly detaches from their perspectives here) when he so easily and carelessly shifts from defending them to calling them "millstones around his neck." This image—of the children as a deadly, hateful burden weighing someone down—will return later, as Ammu repeats it in one of the novel's climactic scenes.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

"D'you know what happens when you hurt people?" Ammu said. "When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less."

A cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed lightly on Rahel's heart. Where its icy legs touched her, she got goosebumps. Six goosebumps on her careless heart.
A little less her Ammu loved her.

**Related Characters:** Ammu (speaker), Rahel Ipe

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Rahel has just said to Ammu, "Why don't you marry him then?"—referring to the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man (who has also just molested Estha). Because of her fraught history with marriage and the social stigma of being a divorcee in a small, conservative Indian town, Ammu is hurt and offended by this question from her child, and in response she says this quotation to Rahel. As with many of the "small things" of the novel, Ammu's words then become a small phrase that has huge consequences.

Here Ammu is seemingly just trying to punish Rahel and make her feel bad for making Ammu herself feel bad, but the fear of being "loved less" is a real and terrifying one for the twins. This then marks the first appearance of "Pappachi's moth" as a symbol of Rahel's inner anxiety, insecurity, and fear. When she hears Ammu's words, Rahel feels like the moth (described just as Pappachi once described the moth he discovered) land on her heart and chill her with the thought of losing Ammu's love. Because of their history, the twins are already insecure about the strength and constancy of Ammu's love, and her statement here, along with the haunting image of the moth on Rahel's heart, will again lead to tragedy later in the novel.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

And the Air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quotation marks the first mention of the novel's titular "Small Things" in those exact words, as the Ipes pick up Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma from the airport. Though there are many unspoken tensions in this important moment—like Chacko's divorce from Margaret Kochamma, the idealized whiteness of Sophie Mol compared to the twins, and Mammachi's jealous hatred of Margaret Kochamma—the only words spoken are small talk.

As Roy suggests here, this is not a phenomenon unique to the Ipe family—it is human nature to cling to the Small Things at "times like these," particularly in tense or uncomfortable family gatherings. There is something ominous about the Big Things, something frightening about their very bigness, that makes them difficult to articulate and embody in a hectic, confusing moment like this. Note also that "Thoughts," "Small Things," and "Big Things" are all capitalized, as Roy continues her pattern of emphasizing certain words, phrases, and objects in a repetitive, childlike style.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight-lipped.
"He can't help having a Man's Needs," she said primly.
Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men's Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House. Neither Mammachi nor Baby Kochamma saw any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal libido.

**Related Characters:** Mammachi (speaker), Navomi Ipe (Baby Kochamma), Chacko Ipe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Mammachi loves her son Chacko intensely, even with a kind of quasi-romantic love, and so she is initially hurt by his many "libertine relationships" with his factory workers. She eventually decides to accept these affairs, however, although she even goes so far as to pay money to Chacko's lovers so that she can see them as "prostitutes" and thus more easily scorn or ignore them. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma's acceptance of Chacko's affairs as "Men's Needs" that "he can't help" then highlights the extreme double standard in the house and society in general. Chacko's "Men's Needs" are seen as something almost sacred, while Ammu's sexuality (particularly later in the novel) is seen as shameful, sinful, and hateful.

The narrator also rather sarcastically points out Chacko's hypocrisy in these affairs, as he likes to play at being a Marxist, but still enjoys his "feudal" powers. He is the wealthy factory owner, and so can exploit his workers even sexually, undercutting any ideals of worker equality he might profess to hold.

Suddenly Ammu hoped that it *had* been him that Rahel saw in the march... She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against... The man standing in the shade of the rubber trees with coins of sunshine dancing on his body, holding her daughter in his arms, glanced up and caught Ammu's gaze. Centuries telescoped into one evanescent moment. History was wrong-footed, caught off guard.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Ammu, Velutha

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here Ammu watches Velutha play with the children, and she sees him as a man, a sexual being, seemingly for the first time. Ammu then thinks about Rahel supposedly seeing Velutha at the Naxalite march, and *hopes*that he was there—Ammu hopes that even behind his "careful cloak of cheerfulness" Velutha shares her anger at the unjust society that oppresses them both.

As Ammu watches Velutha, then, centuries of caste and gender roles "telescope" intothis single moment—another kind of "small thing" affecting many big things. This scene plants the first seed of their forbidden romance, which will break many of the strict rules that Ayemenem society clings to so tightly.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

Velutha shrugged and took the towel away to wash. And rinse. And beat. And wring. As though it was his ridiculous, disobedient brain.
He tried to hate her.
*She's one of them*, he told himself. *Just another one of them.*
He couldn't.
*She had deep dimples when she smiled. Her eyes were always somewhere else.*
Madness slunk in through a chink in History. It took only a moment.

**Related Characters:** Ammu, Velutha

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Velutha discusses the Naxalite march with his brother, and then goes about his chores. He knows he should be afraid that the Ipes (his bosses) saw him there, but he isn't—his anger and the rising anger of exploited workers like him seems to give him new confidence and fearlessness. As he works, Velutha also thinks of Ammu. He tries to hate Ammu because she is wealthy (and an Ipe)—is "just another one of them"—but he finds that he can't. This suggests that Ammu's moment of admiring Velutha was not one-sided—Ammu has also become stuck in Velutha's mind. With this glimpse into Velutha's thought process, then, the narrators shows that he has both the sense of anger at injustice that Ammu hoped he did and a special sympathy (and unwilling romantic attraction) for Ammu herself.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

*If he touched her he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win.*

Who was he, the one-armed man? Who *could* he have been? The God of Loss? The God of Small Things? The God of Goosebumps and Sudden Smiles?

**Related Characters:** Ammu, Velutha

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Ammu is napping, soon after the scene in which she was admiring Velutha. As she sleeps, she dreams about a beautiful one-armed man who can only do one thing at a time—"If he touched her he couldn't talk to her," etc. This dream figure is clearly a stand-in for Velutha, though Ammu is seemingly not yet willing or even able to recognize her sudden attraction to him. Importantly, Ammu's dream introduces the novel's title in the text (as the dream man is called the "God of Small Things") and also connects Ammu and Velutha's forbidden love with the theme of small things. Throughout their brief affair Ammu and Velutha will only focus on small things, on "goosebumps and sudden smiles," because the big things surrounding them (like the sexism, classism, etc. that forbids and condemns their romance) are too terrifying and oppressive to face directly.

As the door was slowly battered down, to control the trembling of her hands, Ammu would hem the ends of Rahel's ribbons that didn't need hemming.
"Promise me you'll always love each other," she'd say, as she drew her children to her.
"Promise," Estha and Rahel would say. Not finding words with which to tell her that for them there *was* no Each, no Other.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Ammu (speaker), Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Ammu

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

The narrative briefly jumps to a moment after Sophie Mol's death, when Ammu has locked herself in her room with the twins and Chacko batters down the door. In the linear narrative of 1969, Estha and Rahel are in this same bedroom (Ammu has just woken from her nap), and so it's as if the room itself has preserved this memory forever, both backwards and forwards in time—this is a flashback from the scenes of 1993, but a "flash forward" for the plot taking place in 1969.

In another example of Roy's focus on "small things," Ammu concentrates on hemming Rahel's ribbons (even though they "didn't need hemming") instead of directly facing the fact that her life is essentially falling apart around her. The passage also emphasizes the closeness of the twins, a closeness that even Ammu cannot understand. Estha and

Rahel don't even think of themselves as separate individuals, but rather as two halves of one whole, a fact that makes their later separation even more tragic and even violating.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ "Because of you!" Ammu had screamed. "If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! *You're* the millstones round my neck!"

**Related Characters:** Ammu (speaker), Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Ammu

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here Ammu's angry, careless words to her children partly set the novel's "Terror" in motion, causing the twins to try to run away—an act which then leads to Sophie Mol's death and later Velutha's as well. Here Ammu again shows her contradictory, volatile nature, as she longs to be free and independent, but feels bound by her children and her own love for and responsibility to them. Usually this is an internal struggle for her, but in this moment of anger and desperation Ammu gives voice to her darkest thoughts. (Note also that she echoes Chacko's casually cruel phrase from earlier in the book, when he called both the twins *and*Ammu "millstones around his neck.")

As we've seen before, the twins have a constant sense of anxiety and insecurity, worrying that Ammu doesn't love them, just as earlier Ammu suggested that Rahel's careless words made Ammu love her a little less. Here that fear is seemingly realized, and the twins decide to run away in despair.

❝ Vellya Paapen began to cry. Half of him wept. Tears welled up in his real eye and shone on his black cheek. With his other eye he stared stonily ahead. An old Paravan, who had seen the Walking Backwards days, torn between Loyalty and Love.
Then the Terror took hold of him and shook the words out of him. He told Mammachi what he had seen. The story of the little boat that crossed the river night after night, and who was in it. The story of a man and woman, standing together in the moonlight. Skin to skin.

**Related Characters:** Mammachi, Vellya Paapen

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, weepingly confesses to Mammachi what he has seen—that Velutha and Ammu are having a secret affair. Vellya Paapen surely knows that something terrible will happen to Velutha as a result of this revelation, but in this tragic moment social obligation and the power of cultural norms win out over familial love. As the passage itself says, the conflicted Vellya Paapen ultimately chooses "Loyalty" over "Love." It is because of this confession that "the Terror"—the novel's tragic climax—truly begins.

The scene again shows the lingering strength of the caste system in places like Ayemenem, even though it has technically been abolished for years (at this point in the novel). Vellya Paapen, like Mammachi, remembers the old days when castes were even more rigidly divided, and Untouchables even more ostracized and oppressed, and he has clearly internalized this external oppression to the point that he truly feels that he and his sons are inferior to people like Mammachi. Thus he is willing to betray Velutha to his fate, feeling that Velutha has truly broken a sacred social law by daring to love Ammu.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ With a street fighter's unerring instincts, Comrade Pillai knew that his straitened circumstances (his small, hot house, his grunting mother, his obvious proximity to the toiling masses) gave him a power over Chacko that in those revolutionary times no amount of Oxford education could match.
He held his poverty like a gun to Chacko's head.

**Related Characters:** Chacko Ipe, Comrade K. N. M. Pillai

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Chacko visits Comrade Pillai, a local Communist leader who also prints labels for the pickle factory, to discuss the Naxalite march and whether or not Velutha was there. Once again Roy shows Chacko's hypocrisy, in that he supports Communism intellectually, and can speak its jargon and play

the part of a "comrade," all while trying to maintain his privilege and still exploiting his position of power.

In the upset of order inherent in Communist revolution, however, Pillai's "proximity to the toiling masses" (his lower class, essentially) makes him more powerful than the wealthy, educated Chacko. In these troubled times of sometimes-violent worker revolts, Pillai's poverty becomes a "gun" he can use against the newly-vulnerable Chacko.

Note also that while Chacko is a hypocrite, so is Pillai—he takes Chacko's money (for new labels for the pickles) even as he plots to overthrow him for the sake of "the masses." In a similar way to Chacko himself, Pillai talks about ideals of equality while simultaneously trying to do what's best for himself at the expense of others.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ "Sophie Mol?" she whispered to the rushing river. "We're here! Here! Near the illimba tree!"
Nothing.
On Rahel's heart Pappachi's moth snapped open its somber wings…
There was no storm-music. No whirlpool spun up from the inky depths of the Meenachal. No shark supervised the tragedy. Just a quiet handing-over ceremony. A boat spilling its cargo. A river accepting the offering. One small life. A brief sunbeam. With a silver thimble clenched for luck in its little fist.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe (speaker), Rahel Ipe, Sophie Mol

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

Estha and Rahel are trying to run away to the History House, convinced that Ammu has rejected them. Sophie Mol convinces the twins to let her join, and the three children take the small boat across the newly flooded river. The boat tips, however, and Sophie Mol drowns—the event foreshadowed from the novel's start, and the beginning of the powerful, lingering entity of "the Loss of Sophie Mol."

While Sophie Mol's is essentially one of the climaxes of the book, and becomes a long-lasting tragedy for the entire Ipe family, Roy portrays the actual moment of her drowning with her usual method of describing "small things"—a technique here used to poignant and tragic effect. Sophie Mol's death is portrayed as a small and random accident, a "brief sunbeam" extinguished without drama or fanfare. It is only the "big things" that exist at its edges that turn it into such a monumental event.

Pappachi's moth also returns here as a symbol of Rahel's fear and anxiety, as she realizes she has lost her cousin, and that everything is about to change.

## Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Blue-lipped and dinner-plate-eyed, they watched, mesmerized by something that they sensed but didn't understand: the absence of caprice in what the policemen did. The abyss where anger should have been. The sober, steady brutality, the economy of it all.
They were opening a bottle.
Or shutting a tap.
Cracking an egg to make an omelette.
The twins were too young to know that these were only history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

The twins, unknowingly asleep near Velutha at the History House, wake up to see the police brutally beating him. Baby Kochamma has told the police that Velutha tried to rape Ammu and kidnapped the children, and so they find him and administer their "justice" swiftly and efficiently.

In this moment Estha and Rahel don't understand what is happening, but the narrator steps back to show that the beating is as much a result of larger social and historical forces as it is an individual instance of violence and brutality. The police aren't personally angry or passionate, and the narrator, taking a tragically detached tone, describes them as just acting as they must to preserve the status quo: "cracking an egg to make an omelette." Roy then goes on to clarify just what this status quo is, the social and historical forces the policemen are trying to maintain with their violent actions: the hierarchy of civilization over nature, men over women, and power over powerlessness.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

The twins looked up at her. Not together (but almost) two frightened voices whispered, “Save Ammu.”
In the years to come they would replay this scene in their heads. As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been deceived into doing what they did? Had they been tricked into condemnation?
In a way, yes. But it wasn’t as simple as that. They both knew that they had been given a choice. And how quick they had been in the choosing! They hadn’t given it more than a second of thought before they looked up and said (not together, but almost) “Save Ammu.” Save us. Save our mother.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha) (speaker), Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Ammu, Navomi Ipe (Baby Kochamma)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

Baby Kochamma tries to convince the twins to lie and say that Velutha indeed kidnapped them and killed Sophie Mol: repeating the lies that Baby Kochamma herself first told to the police. Baby Kochamma is trying to protect herself, because if it's determined that she lied and Velutha was beaten without reason, then she would be punished—but here she cleverly frames the twins' choice as one of "saving Ammu" or not. If they lie, Baby Kochamma suggests, Velutha (who, she says, will die either way) will take all the blame, and Ammu will be saved—but if the twins deny Baby Kochamma's story, then both they and Ammu will go to jail (supposedly for the murder of Sophie Mol).

When faced with this choice, Estha and Rahel quickly decide to go along with Baby Kochamma, offering just a whisper of "Save Ammu." This small, two-word phrase has vast repercussions, then, as the narrative suddenly steps back and defines this as the moment the twins truly lose their innocence. Their decision to "Save Ammu" clearly haunts Estha and Rahel for years, as they question whether they were really tricked and innocent, or if they knew what they were doing—if they freely chose family over honesty, loyalty over truth, and comfort over suffering.

Inspector Thomas Mathew squatted on his haunches and raked his jeep key across the sole of Velutha’s foot. Swollen eyes opened. Wandered. Then focused through a film of blood on a beloved child. Estha imagined that something in him smiled. Not his mouth, but some other unhurt part of him…
The Inspector asked his question. Estha’s mouth said Yes.
Childhood tiptoed out.
Silence slid in like a bolt.
Someone switched off the light and Velutha disappeared.

**Related Characters:** Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Velutha, Inspector Thomas Mathew

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

### Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel it's apparent that Estha ends up even more traumatized by the "Terror" than Rahel does, and here we finally see why. Both twins decide together to "save Ammu," but Estha is the one who has to actually betray Velutha to his face. Inspector Mathew asks Estha a question (presumably, did Velutha kidnap the children and kill Sophie Mol?), and Estha says "Yes." Estha eventually stops speaking altogether after uttering this fatal "yes," to the point that he is totally silent in the scenes from 1993.

This is perhaps the tragic climax to the novel, as Estha truly loses his innocence and Velutha becomes the complete and helpless victim of all the sins of the other characters and of society itself. Yet again Roy describes the monumental events through "small things," and small things end up having the greatest impact. Velutha is portrayed only through fragmentary descriptions, and the small word "yes" comes to haunt Estha for the rest of his life.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

This was the stuff their dreams were made of. On the day that Estha was Returned. Chalk. Blackboards. Proper punishments.
They didn’t ask to be let off lightly. They asked only for punishments that fitted their crimes. Not ones that came like cupboards with built-in bedrooms. Not ones you spent your whole life in, wandering through its maze of shelves.

**Related Characters:** Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

Rahel, Estha, and Ammu describe their dream house, which they imagine they will get some day—even though in the present Estha is about to be "Returned," and he will go on to never see Ammu again, and won't see Rahel again for twenty-three years. The house remains a fantasy, one that will never be realized.

While this is tragic in itself, a crucial part of the dream is the way the twins think of the school they will go to—a school where there will be small and simple things (like "chalk" and "blackboards") but also where there are "proper punishments." The twins don't long for anything unrealistic or idealized, but only want punishments that fit the crimes they are punishing—instead of punishments that are endless and haunting, like the one they feel they have received for their "crime" of running away and then "saving Ammu." Just as Rahel previously wanted Ammu to punish her instead of "loving her less," the twins now would rather have a simple (and even harsh) punishment instead of the lingering guilt and sense of brokenness that haunts them.

❝ There was very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings…
But what was there to say?
Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons… Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief.
Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.

**Related Characters:** Rahel Ipe, Esthappen Yako Ipe (Estha), Mammachi

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

This scene is the climax of the novel's 1993 storyline—the day when Estha and Rahel are finally reunited after twenty-three years. After acting distant and wary for a while (and Estha remaining silent, as he now has for years), the twins here lie down together and cry, and then they have sex.

The narrator presents the twins' act as, like their Ammu's affair with Velutha, breaking the "Love Laws" (through committing incest, in this case), but also describes it as being like one person who was split in half becoming whole again. This controversial and ambiguous act is not a "happy ending," certainly, or even a resolution to all the tragedy Estha and Rahel have experienced, but is at least a definitive expression of the "hideous grief" that has haunted the twins for so long. As described in an earlier passage, they never used to even consider themselves separate individuals, but only two parts of one whole, and now they have at least been fully reunited—and can hopefully begin to heal together after this expression of grief.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things.

**Related Characters:** Ammu, Velutha

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:**

**Explanation and Analysis**

The final chapter describes Ammu and Velutha's brief love affair, ending on a note of hope and romance despite all the tragedy that we know will follow these events. Once again the "small things" hide the "big things" here, as Ammu and Velutha cling to each present moment, each tiny fragment of their surroundings, to avoid facing the many social, cultural, personal, and historical forces that would divide and crush them. When the two lovers only see the small things, they can briefly forget that he is an Untouchable and she from a wealthy, upper-caste family; that she is a divorcee with two children and he a poor factory worker; that she represents the ruling class and he the rebelling worker class. This is the beauty of Ammu and Velutha's love, and also its downfall—it was only ever a fragile, fleeting thing, and so could never survive the larger forces that seek to destroy it.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### CHAPTER 1: PARADISE PICKLES & PRESERVES

The narrator introduces Ayemenem, a small town in Kerala, India, and describes the humid jungle and the monsoons that come in June. In 1993 Rahel Ipe is returning to her childhood home in Ayemenem, where her great-aunt Navomi Ipe (whom everyone calls Baby Kochamma) still lives. Rahel has come back see her "dizygotic" twin Estha, who she hasn't seen in twenty-three years. As children Rahel and Estha didn't look alike, but they always thought of themselves as a single person in separate bodies, and they share certain memories and dreams that only one twin experienced.

*The story will be told in fragments, mostly jumping between scenes in 1969 (focusing on Sophie Mol's visit) and 1993, when the twins are reunited at age thirty-one. This style, focusing on small moments broken apart and examined separately, connects to the theme of "small things" in the novel. "Kochamma" is a female honorific title, not an actual name.*

After their long separation, however, the twins are now distinct individuals and strangers from each other. The narrator describes their birth. The twins' parents, Baba and Ammu, were driving to the hospital when their car broke down, so they had to take a bus. Estha and Rahel were almost born in the bus, and later they wished they had been, as they got the idea that it would mean free bus passes for life.

*The relationship between Estha and Rahel is one of the most important of the book, as they think of themselves as a single entity, but then have different experiences and are separated for years. The Ipe family is relatively well off – they have a car.*

The story then jumps to 1969 (when the twins are seven years old), to the funeral for Sophie Mol, Estha and Rahel's cousin and the daughter of their uncle Chacko, Ammu's sister. Sophie was visiting from England when she died. At the funeral Ammu, Estha, and Rahel are made to stand apart from the rest of the mourners. Rahel imagines that Sophie Mol is still alive in her coffin, showing Rahel the ceiling of the church. Rahel imagines a man falling from the ceiling and dying, and she thinks of other "breaking men" and a smell like "old roses." Rahel then watches a bat climb up Baby Kochamma's sari, and she sees Sophie Mol cartwheel in her coffin while everyone is distracted.

*Roy creates tension by basically revealing the end (Sophie Mol will die) at the beginning, and then jumping back and forth in time to slowly reveal how this comes to pass. "Mol" is a term meaning "girl," and again "Kochamma" is an honorific – Roy's style of free indirect discourse involves telling the story partly through the eyes of the young twins, so these characters (and others, like Ammu) are only named in the way the twins refer to them. Rahel clearly has a very active imagination that allows her to avoid confronting tragedy.*

After the funeral Ammu and the twins go to the police station, and Ammu asks to see someone named Velutha. Thomas Mathew, the police inspector, calls Ammu a *veshya* (prostitute) and threatens her if she doesn't go home quietly. Ammu leaves and starts to cry, and Estha helps her onto a bus and hugs her.

*There is more to this "ending" than just Sophie Mol's death, as Ammu has been socially disgraced in some way. The story starts out very confusingly, but Roy gives out enough information to keep up the tension.*

Two weeks after that, Estha was "Returned" – sent to live with his father (the twins parents are divorced) in Calcutta. Soon afterward he began to grow quieter and quieter until he stopped speaking altogether. The quietness helped him erase the words describing his painful memories, and he began to take long walks around the neighborhood. Twenty-three years later, Baba has "re-returned" Estha to Ayemenem, and now Estha walks around the old familiar places of the village. Since Rahel has returned, however, the quietness in Estha's head has been broken by the sounds of memories.

*We first see the results of whatever trauma occurred around Sophie Mol's death. The twins, who considered themselves as almost one person, are separated for years, and Estha retreats into silence to avoid his terrible memories. Roy capitalizes and emphasizes certain phrases that linger in the childrens' consciousness (like Estha being "Returned"), as part of her style of presenting the world as the twins perceive it.*

The story then follows Rahel after her separation from Estha. She lived with her uncle Chacko and grandmother Mammachi in Ayemenem during the summers, where the "Loss of Sophie Mol" still remained long after the memory of Sophie Mol herself faded. Meanwhile Rahel drifted from school to school, get expelled for different strange reasons like stealing a teacher's wig and purposefully crashing into other students. Basically she was exercising her curiosity about the world, as no one was around to raise her or teach her about life.

*"The Loss of Sophie Mol" is a separate entity from Sophie Mol herself, which introduces the theme of preservation. Whatever traumatic events occurred in 1969 have lingered on in the Ayemenem House, despite Estha's attempts to silence them. Rahel kept her curiosity and active imagination, but both twins act like "lost souls" without the other around.*

Rahel eventually went to an architecture college in Delhi, where she stayed for eight years without ever graduating. There she met Larry McCaslin, an American student, and she married him and moved to Boston. Eventually he grew weary of her constant detachment and depression, as she watched horrible things happening in India and always felt an emptiness where Estha used to be. They were divorced, and then Rahel heard that Estha had come back to Ayemenem, so she returned as well.

*Roy also attended architecture college, and also grew up in Kerala with a brother of similar age. Later the narrator will characterize the adult Estha as "Quietness" and the adult Rahel as "Emptiness," both of them lost without the other. The personal trauma of the Ipe family is also shown as just a fragment of the political upheaval happening in India.*

Baby Kochamma, who is now eighty-three, is pleased that Estha doesn't speak to Rahel when they interact now, and she gets no special treatment from him. Baby Kochamma doesn't like the twins, and she wishes they would leave soon, as they make her uncomfortable. In her old age she has started wearing all of Mammachi's jewelry at once and putting on lots of makeup.

*Baby Kochamma will be an antagonist to the twins and Ammu. Each of the family members struggle with social obligation, love, and personal dislike in their relationships, but Baby Kochamma always puts her own well-being first. With her makeup and jewelry, Baby Kochamma is just another thing being "preserved" in Ayemenem.*

When she was eighteen, Baby Kochamma fell in love with an Irish monk named Father Mulligan. Father Mulligan would visit Baby Kochamma's father, who was a reverend in the Syrian Christian community (and famous for once having been blessed by the Patriarch of Antioch), and Baby Kochamma would make up questions about the Bible as an excuse to talk to him. Then she started performing charitable actions to impress him, but nothing ever came of it.

*The Patriarch of Antioch is the head of the Syrian Christian Church. Though Baby Kochamma has a tragic backstory of unrequited love, even in her youth she was very self-centered – using her Christianity and charitable acts only as a means of seeming like a good person to society and Father Mulligan.*

Eventually Father Mulligan left Kerala and Baby Kochamma followed him to Madras, defying her father and becoming a Roman Catholic. She joined a convent, but soon realized she would hardly ever see Father Mulligan, so she sent for her father to fetch her. Her father knew she was unlikely to find a husband now, so he sent her to school to study Ornamental Gardening. Baby Kochamma never stopped loving Father Mulligan from afar, but she stayed in Ayemenem, grew very fat, and spent all her time gardening.

*Roy will often criticize the patriarchal system of India, where a manless woman has basically wasted her life and is seen as worthless. Baby Kochamma sticks with the status quo and allows herself to decline without a husband, spending all her time mourning and preserving Father Mulligan's memory, as well as indulging in her own personal grudges and jealousy.*

Almost fifty years later Baby Kochamma discovered television, and since then her garden has been abandoned. She and Kochu Maria, the house cook, watch American TV shows all day and enter all the contests they see. Baby Kochamma has also grown very paranoid, and she keeps her doors, windows, and even her refrigerator locked.

*Roy will later comment that Baby Kochamma's paranoia is based in the fear of "being displaced" – the Ipe family is of an upper class of landowners, and Baby Kochamma is the type to cling to old class divisions and fear any kind of social change.*

Baby Kochamma questions Rahel suspiciously, but Rahel ignores her. Rahel looks out at the old pickle factory, Paradise Pickles & Preserves, which sits between the house and the river. Mammachi used to run it and make a variety of preserved products, including banana jam, which was officially illegal as it could not be categorized as either jam or jelly. Rahel thinks about how this difficulty with classification is the source of many of her family's troubles, as they all broke some kind of social rule.

*The pickle factory is an important symbol of the theme of preservation, as the Ipes (especially Mammachi, the pickle maker) preserve old traditions and class divisions. Even Mammachi makes banana jam, however – suggesting that none of the Ipes could stick to the status quo, and this ultimately led to tragedy. Roy just hasn't said what kind of tragedy yet.*

The story jumps back to 1969, after Sophie Mol's death, when Baby Kochamma acted self-righteously pious even though much of the trouble was her fault. Ammu consulted a "Twin Expert" about separating her children, and the expert said that it would be okay to send Estha away. So Estha took the train to Madras and then to Calcutta, still haunted by the face of a beat-up young man and the smell of old roses.

*We still don't know what Baby Kochamma has done, but she already appears as a negative character because of her self-righteousness, laziness, and jealousy. She clearly puts herself and the "family name" above the actual other members of the family. Certain small things – like the smell of old roses – signify big things and lingering memories.*

The narrator steps back, musing that "things can change in a day," and that little, seemingly ordinary things can add up to life-changing events. The story potentially began with Sophie Mol's arrival in India, but the narrator says that it also could have begun centuries before, when the Hindu caste system was laid down, including the "Love Laws."

*The novel contains a contradictory mix of "small things" – the little moments and objects that Roy uses to build up a story, and a writing style that takes a childlike view of a brutal world – and "big things," like the ancient caste system and political turmoil in India. Despite the family's attempts at preservation, "things can change in a day" is one of the novel's most frequent refrains.*

## CHAPTER 2: PAPPACHI'S MOTH

The narrative picks up in 1969 as Estha, Rahel, Ammu, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma drive in the family's blue Plymouth to Cochin, where they will see *The Sound of Music* (for the third time), stay at the Hotel Sea Queen, and then pick up Sophie Mol and her mother, Margaret Kochamma, from the airport. Margaret Kochamma is Chacko's ex-wife, an English woman who left him for a man named Joe. Joe has recently died, and Chacko invited Margaret and Sophie to spend the holidays with him in Ayemenem.

*Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma's arrival in India is the setting for most of the novel's action. The Ipes are an upper-class family with their own car (and pickle factory). Roy herself said that her family also made "pilgrimages" to see* The Sound of Music *when she was young.*

The narrator gives various descriptions of the characters in the car. Ammu currently has no surname, as she can only choose between her ex-husband's name or her father's name. Estha has his hair in an "Elvis puff," and Rahel has her hair tied up in a band called a "Love-in-Tokyo." She is wearing a watch with the time painted on it. Chacko, a former Rhodes scholar, quotes from *The Great Gatsby* as they drive.

*Ammu is also a "man-less woman" like Baby Kochamma, but Ammu refuses to accept her situation as inferior, and she rages against the unfair patriarchal society. Certain descriptors like the "Puff" and the "Love-in-Tokyo" come up again and again, emphasizing the innocence and youthfulness of the twins.*

Ammu is twenty-seven years old, and she remembers her past, mostly her fatal mistake of marrying the wrong man. When she was eighteen she moved with her father to Ayemenem, and because she had no dowry no one asked to marry her. The rebellious, independent Ammu escaped for a summer to Calcutta, where she met her husband at a wedding reception. They moved to Assam and were happy for a while, until Ammu learned that her husband was an alcoholic and a compulsive liar.

*Ammu's father was cruel and abusive (as we will learn) and her husband was as well, but Ammu can still only choose between these men's last names to have any kind of social standing. Ammu has the kind of fiery, independent spirit that rebels against the injustice she grew up with, but as a divorced woman she is basically powerless.*

After Estha and Rahel were born, Ammu's husband (Baba) tried to prostitute her to his boss in order to keep his job (which he was losing because of drinking), and he beat her when she refused. When the violence continued and spread to the children, Ammu left her husband and returned to Ayemenem. Her parents reluctantly took her back, but she was always disgraced in the town for being a divorcee.

*Instead of offering an escape from her oppressive life in Ayemenem, Baba just becomes another man abusing his power over Ammu. The Ipe family and the people of Ayemenem still cling to the traditional views of a "man-less woman" as worthless and disgraceful. Unfortunately, most of the "love" relationships in the novel are abusive and unhealthy.*

The narrator describes Ammu's "Unsafe Edge," how on certain days she would seem dangerous and wild, like she had nothing to lose, but on other days she was a caring, mature mother to the twins. The narrator muses that it was her recklessness that led her to later "love by night the man her children loved by day."

*Ammu's contradictory nature makes her an intriguing character but also leads to great tragedy for herself and the children. The narrator offers more little hints about the events to come.*

The story returns to the car ride in the Plymouth. Even in 1969 Baby Kochamma doesn't like the twins, as they are half Hindu and the children of a divorced woman, so she is always trying to make them feel unhappy about their unhappy fate. Despite her grudge, the children draw great joy from each other.

*Baby Kochamma gives great importance to society's opinion and tries to preserve political and social divisions. She sees the twins as "less-than" because of their heritage as children of divorce and mixed religious background, and so thinks they should feel ashamed.*

Rahel thinks about the car and how on its roof is a sign advertising Paradise Pickles & Preserves. The pickle company began with Mammachi's small personal business. She began to be successful just as her husband was retiring, and Pappachi was bitter and jealous. He would beat her nightly with a brass flower vase, until one day the adult Chacko returned and put a stop to it. Pappachi took out his rage by destroying a rocking chair, and he never spoke to Mammachi again.

*Pappachi is another antagonistic, negative character and an example of the abusive power of the patriarchy. Pappachi is never punished for his brutal violence, and in fact is seen as a model citizen in public. Yet despite his brutal actions, Mammachi never complained, and she still tries to uphold the traditional society that condoned such beatings.*

Earlier in life Pappachi had worked as an "Imperial Entomologist," and once he discovered a moth he believed was a new species. He was not believed about this until years later, after his retirement, and then the moth was named not after Pappachi but after some other entomologist that Pappachi disliked. Pappachi considered this the greatest failure of his life, and the moth supposedly inspired his fits of rage in later life. Pappachi's moth then came to "haunt" all his descendants with fear and misfortune. Mammachi still cried when Pappachi died, and Ammu told the twins it was because Mammachi had gotten used to her husband and his violence.

*Pappachi's moth will become a symbol of fear and unhappiness, especially for Rahel. The moth is another small thing that symbolizes a larger stream of events, like Pappachi's abusive nature. The fact that Mammachi could live with Pappachi, and even cry when he died, shows how deeply ingrained such traditions as the male-dominated Indian social system are. Pappachi, as Imperial Entomologist, represents the old upper class.*

Chacko describes Pappachi as an "anglophile," and admits that everyone in the family is an anglophile. He describes history as an old house, and the twins think he is talking about "the History House," an old place across the river that was owned by Kari Saipu, an Englishman who "went native." Chacko laments the state of the Indian people, whose dreams have been commandeered by their colonizers. The twins would later grow more familiar with the History House, as a place where history was acted out as violence, and again they think of the smell of old roses.

*India gained its independence from Britain years earlier, but evidence of British culture is everywhere, like the fact that the family speaks English and is going to see a movie in English. Kari Saipu was a symbol of the colonizer as the kind of man to steal Indian dreams and "redream" them, an Englishman trying to take on the culture of India. The narrator portrays the twins' personal tragedy as a slice of a larger history of violence in India.*

The narrator describes Chacko's habit of assembling model airplanes and then almost immediately crashing them, despite Mammachi's assertion that her son is one of the "cleverest men in India." After Pappachi died, Chacko quit his job teaching at a college and moved back to Ayemenem, hoping to become a "pickle baron." He took over the factory from Mammachi, bought new equipment, and hired lots of workers, but the business immediately declined.

*Chacko, as a man, was given all the love and privilege that Ammu was denied. He is also one of the few members of the family with actual credentials to back up his pride and sense of superiority – others like Baby Kochamma rely solely on the family name and class.*

In the car the twins are worried about being late for *The Sound of Music*, as they get stopped by an approaching train. While they wait the twins read signs backwards. They used to quote *The Jungle Book* and *The Tempest*, and were offended when Miss Mitten, a missionary friend of Baby Kochamma's, gave them a book for little children. They recited the book to Miss Mitten with all the words backwards, and she said she saw "Satan in their eyes."

*The twins are clearly intelligent and imaginative children, who are unfortunately stifled by their situation. Reading words backwards becomes a recurring motif, and will connect to Estha's later act of silence, as both manipulating words and refusing to speak any words are efforts to suppress the memories those words signify.*

Most of the waiting cars shut off their engines as the delay lengthens. Beggars and vendors appear, and Estha watches Murlidharan, an insane man who sits on the milestone at the crossing, counting his keys and reliving old memories, while Rahel imagines what is happening in *The Sound of Music*. Suddenly the beggars disappear and a huge march of Marxists sweeps through the line of cars, carrying red flags.

*Murlidharan is a kind of extreme example of the "preservation" of old memories – a potential insanity that the twins will face because of their traumatic pasts. The Communist Party is very successful in Kerala during this time period, and threatens to upset the social order the Ipes defend.*

Chacko himself is a "self-proclaimed Marxist," but he is still a landlord driving a nice car, so he is quiet and afraid. Baby Kochamma is terrified and tries to avoid eye contact with any of the marchers. Thousands of people pass chanting "Workers of the World Unite!" The narrator steps back and describes the swift rise of the Communist Party in Kerala, and the theories about why it was so successful.

*Though Chacko agrees with Marxist ideas, in practice he still upholds the class divisions between landlord and laborer. This march is an early sign of what will fuel Baby Kochamma's paranoia. The rise of Communism is the kind of large social change that the entrenched upper class fears.*

Chacko had become enthralled with Marxism in college, and he and Pappachi would argue every day about the Communist government – led by Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad – that had recently been elected in Kerala. The government grew more and more violent in its "transition" until the Congress Party returned to power. Ten years of political chaos followed, and then the Communists were reelected.

*Chacko can dabble in Marxism without consequences, as he has the luxury of not actually belonging to the laboring class. Years later Namboodiripad will become the leader of the first democratically elected Communist government of all of India.*

There had recently been a famine in India, so the government put revolution on hold to fight hunger. This angered the Chinese Communist Party, and they began to support a militant faction of the Indian Communist Party called the Naxalites. The Naxalites had since broken off and begun arming militias in small villages and occasionally killing landowners.

*The Naxalite movement is the great fear of the upper classes during this time. Communism had entered Kerala "insidiously", rarely upsetting the status quo, but the anger and violence of the Naxalites directly threatens the established social order and makes those at the top of that order want to preserve it all the more.*

The marchers that day are on their way to demand a one-hour lunch break and that Untouchable workers not have to be addressed by their "caste names." The march contains both Touchables and Untouchables, and it is full of palpable anger. In the Plymouth, Rahel sees Velutha (a young man she knows) holding a Marxist flag and she rolls down the window, leans out of it, and yells for him. Velutha disappears and Ammu and Baby Kochamma pull Rahel back into the car, furious.

*The more radical Communist ideas targeted not only the hierarchy of landowners and laborers, but also the deeply entrenched caste system of India. In Marxist thought, people are divided by class, not caste, so in theory Untouchables and Touchables should be seen as equals. This kind of change was too radical for many Indian Communists, however, as Roy will reveal.*

The narrator describes Velutha, who is an Untouchable, a Paravan. He has a leaf-shaped birthmark on his back. As he child he worked for Pappachi with his father, Vellya Paapen, but they were not allowed to enter the Ipe house or touch anything the Touchables touched. In older times Untouchables had even had to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their "unclean" footprints.

*Velutha is a Dalit, an Untouchable, which is a caste seen from birth as inferior no matter a person's actions or abilities. Though the idea of caste comes from Hinduism, it became a deeply ingrained social system to the point that even Syrian Christians like the Ipes hold the same extreme prejudices.*

Even as a child, Velutha was very skilled with his hands, and later he learned carpentry from a German carpenter. Velutha built the Ipe dining room table, the sliding back door, and set up all the machines in the pickle factory when Chacko took over. Vellya Paapen worried about his son, as Velutha had none of the shame and self-deprecation that Untouchables were supposed to have.

*Untouchables are supposed to see themselves as inherently inferior, but Velutha clearly lacks that self-hatred and is confident in his own rights and abilities. The only way he can express this is by fighting against the unfair system that oppresses him, and hoping that Communism will bring change.*

Soon afterward Velutha disappeared for four years. Meanwhile his brother, Kuttappen, had an accident and was paralyzed. Velutha then returned to Ayemenem and Chacko hired him to work for Paradise Pickles. The other workers sometimes grumbled about his presence, so Mammachi paid him less than the Touchable workers, but she still felt she was giving Velutha special treatment, and that he should be grateful.

*It is not just the Ipes, but even the laborers of Ayemenem feel the same sense of superiority over Untouchables. It is ironic that Velutha, the figure most representing social, political, and personal upheaval, works at the pickle factory where the old ways are preserved.*

The narrator then hints at "the Terror" that would come later, and how Vellya Paapen came to Mammachi and offered to kill his own son. But earlier, in the months before the present narrative, Velutha and the twins had become very close friends, and he cooked for them and made them toys.

*Vellya Paapen and Velutha will also share a complex relationship where love struggles with social obligation. Velutha is one of the most innocent, positive adult characters of the book.*

Back in the present one of the marchers opens the car's door and mocks Baby Kochamma, giving her a Marxist flag and making her wave it. When he leaves and the march ends Chacko asks Rahel if she really saw Velutha among the marchers, as that could mean trouble for the factory. The narrator says that Baby Kochamma focused her anger and shame at Velutha in the days after that, so that in her mind he came to take the place of the marcher who had humiliated her.

*Chacko is concerned that a Naxalite-type revolution could occur at the pickle factory – again an example of preservation fearing change. Baby Kochamma allows her personal grudges to eclipse her moral judgment. All her fear of social embarrassment and being displaced comes to focus in a hatred for Velutha.*

As they keep waiting the twins think about Ammu telling them the story of Julius Caesar. Estha used to act out the *Et tu, Brute?* scene to Kochu Maria, who thought he was insulting her in English. Ammu used the famous betrayal to explain that no one could be trusted, and that even Estha could grow up to be a "Male Chauvinist Pig."

*Estha quoting Caesar is an ironic foreshadowing of how he will later "betray" Velutha, scarring himself for life in the process. Ammu lashes out against the patriarchy, but she is basically powerless in her situation.*

Estha and Rahel blow spit bubbles in the car, which infuriates Ammu, as it reminds her of Baba. Chacko comes to the childrens' defense, and the angry Ammu tells him to stop playing the savior, as he doesn't really care about the twins at all. Chacko basically agrees, and says that Ammu, Estha, and Rahel are "millstones around his neck." Then the train passes by and Chacko starts the car again.

*Chacko has all the privilege and power that Ammu does not, so he can afford to play-act as Marxist, as father-uncle, and as professor, all the while admitting that he doesn't really care about the twins at all. Estha and Rahel, on the other hand, long for Chacko's affection.*

## CHAPTER 3: BIG MAN THE LALTAIN, SMALL MAN THE MOMBATTI

The narrative returns to 1993, where the Ayemenem house has grown filthy and decrepit while Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria spend all their time watching TV. They watch a subway busker play on the Phil Donahue show, and the narrator muses about something a man once told Estha about dreams: "Big Man the Lantern, Small Man the Tallow-stick."

*The dirty, dilapidated house is a tragic prize for Baby Kochamma's jealous "preservation" of the Ipe family name. The busker is like the Indian people, whose dreams have been stolen and "redreamed" by others.*

Estha enters the house silently, and Baby Kochamma proudly predicts what he will do, as he has the same habits every day. Rahel follows him to his room, Ammu's old room, which is obsessively clean. She watches Estha undress, studying his nakedness for familiarity. She touches his ear but Estha doesn't react, and he begins to wash his clothes in a bucket.

*The adult Estha obsessively cleaning himself is a foreshadowing of the "uncleanness" he will experience in the next chapter. Estha and Rahel study each other carefully, as they are basically strangers at this point.*

## CHAPTER 4: ABHILASH TALKIES

Back in 1969 the family reaches the cinema hall, which is called "Abhilash Talkies." Ammu, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel go into the girls' bathroom and take turns peeing into the same toilet. Rahel enjoys the intimacy this activity creates. Meanwhile Estha goes alone into the boys' bathroom and climbs onto some junk so he is tall enough to pee in the urinal. Chacko has gone to see about the hotel.

*Estha and Rahel constantly seem to be seeking more love from a family that generally disapproves of them. This scene is one of the only times Rahel feels close to Baby Kochamma. Estha is a more serious child, who dresses nicely and insists on using the urinal like an adult.*

The family enters the movie theater, where *The Sound of Music* has already begun. In the movie the nuns are singing "How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria," and Estha can't stop himself singing along in his high, pure voice. The people in the audience get angry, but Estha can't seem to help singing, so Ammu sends him out to the lobby.

*This scene emphasizes Estha's purity and innocence just before he is molested. The children are more innocent and free in their actions, while the adults must always consider their social obligations.*

Estha sits down and sings in the lobby, and he wakes up the man selling refreshments, the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man." The fat, dirty man is angry at first, but then he coaxes Estha into accepting a free drink and coming behind the counter. The man asks Estha about Ayemenem and his Mammachi, and he makes Estha hold his penis while Estha drinks the lemon drink. Estha recites the different pickled products Mammachi makes to try and mentally escape from the situation. Then the man ejaculates onto Estha's hand, wipes it off, and sends him back into the movie.

*This is the first major traumatic experience of the book, and basically when Estha first "loses his innocence." It is also the first major experience that one twin has had without the other. Roy still portrays the horrible scene from a childlike point of view, so the man is always known as the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man." This is yet another example of a love/sexual relationship being abusive and violating.*

Estha feels unclean and traumatized. He watches the clean, white children in *The Sound of Music* and compares them to his own feeling of dirtiness and degradation. In his mind he associates Sophie Mol with these white children who seem more deserving of love than he. Estha gets nauseated and Ammu takes him into the bathroom. He retches and washes his hands and face many times, and then Ammu takes him to get a lemon drink to cheer him up.

*Much of the novel is about a series of causes and effects, and the twins were already worried about the white Sophie Mol somehow stealing their Ammu's love. Estha now feels impure and less deserving of love, which will affect his actions later in the novel. Estha cleans himself thoroughly, as he will continue to do obsessively as an adult.*

The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man is polite and friendly to Ammu, but he also mentions that he knows exactly where Paradise Pickles is. Estha knows that this is a veiled threat, and he helplessly accepts some sweets from the man and says nothing to Ammu. Ammu makes the rest of the family leave the movie, as she doesn't want Estha to risk a fever before Sophie Mol comes. They walk through the lobby and the Orangedrink Man offers Rahel a sweet, but she is repulsed by his yellow teeth and turns away.

*Even though Estha has said nothing to Rahel, they share an innate sense and Rahel knows to be afraid of the Orangedrink Man. Unfortunately Ammu and the family are more concerned with the impression they will make on Sophie Mol than worried about Estha's health. Estha feeling unsafe at home will also contribute to his future actions.*

As they are walking out Ammu compliments the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's friendliness, and Rahel unthinkingly says "why don't you marry him then?" Everyone freezes, and Ammu tells Rahel that when you hurt someone, they love you a little less. Rahel feels Pappachi's moth land on her heart, and she is terrified that Ammu now loves her less.

*In Rahel's active imagination, the moth becomes an eerie image of fear and unhappiness. Ammu's social standing is a touchy subject, as she is basically living as a disgraced woman because she is divorced.*

They take a taxi to the Hotel Sea Queen, and Estha longs for a river to wash away his sickness. The family goes up to Chacko's room, where he is feasting. Rahel asks Ammu to punish her, but Ammu says "some things come with their own punishments." Then Estha goes off to sleep with Ammu and Baby Kochamma, and Rahel, panicked about losing Ammu's love, stays with Chacko.

*This idea of punishment also connects to the effects "small things" have on people's lives – small mistakes like Rahel's careless phrase should come with a small punishment. Later the twins will long only for "punishments that fit their crimes" instead of ones that last a lifetime.*

Chacko lies awake and thinks about Sophie Mol, who is coming tomorrow. He last saw her as a baby after his wife Margaret told Chacko she was leaving him for Joe. Rahel can't sleep either, and she asks Chacko worriedly if it's possible that Ammu will love Sophie Mol more than she loves the twins. Chacko says anything is possible.

*Chacko offers Rahel no comfort, as he is lost in his own personal family drama. Because of her contradictory personality Ammu's love often seems like a fragile thing, and the twins are horribly afraid of losing it.*

In the other room Estha wakes up and vomits in the sink. Then he goes and stands outside Rahel's room. Rahel somehow knows he is there and opens the door for him. Chacko ignores them and wonders if Velutha was really in the Communist march earlier. Comrade K. N. M. Pillai, the head of the Party in Ayemenem, had been hoping to create a new labor union at Paradise Pickles. Chacko himself talked to his workers about Marxism, but Pillai would also invite them into his printing press and encourage them to rebel against Chacko, all the while printing labels for Paradise Pickles as well.

*This is another concrete example of the mysterious connection the twins share. Chacko supports Marxism intellectually, but he still wants to act as a landlord in everything but name. Pillai also seems less than idealistic, as he feels no qualms about doing business with wealthy-Chacko, talking Marxism with comrade-Chacko, and plotting the overthrow of landlord-Chacko all at the same time.*

Velutha is the only card-carrying Communist in the factory, but Pillai does not want him as an ally because he is an Untouchable. Still the workers began asking for raises, and Mammachi always acted as the traditional landlord and denied them. Chacko meanwhile continued to play-act as a Marxist and ignore the discontent. Chacko lies in bed and muses that maybe he will organize his own labor union. On the next bed Estha and Rahel sleep while embracing each other. They dream about their river, which runs behind the Ayemenem house.

*Despite the goals of the Communist march and Velutha's obvious intelligence and ability, in Ayemenem Velutha will never be anything more than an Untouchable. Mammachi sticks to the class divides, which are unfair but comprehensible – she is the pickle-maker, the preserver of tradition – while Chacko tries to blur the lines between boss and worker.*

## CHAPTER 5: GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

The narrative returns to 1993, where Rahel discovers that the river has been reduced to a trickle and is too polluted to swim in. Across the river the History House (which Rahel thinks of as the "Heart of Darkness") has been built up into a five-star hotel. In the hotel history is neatly repackaged for tourists to easily understand, and the traditional kathakali performances (an ancient dance and drama telling myths and stories) are shortened drastically. The narrator points out that a small thing lingers there among the hotel buildings, buried in the dirt: Rahel's old plastic wristwatch with the time painted on.

*This watch is one of the "small things" signifying a larger event of violence, but the watch itself also symbolizes the theme of preservation – the time is painted on the watch, so time is literally frozen. The image becomes especially potent considering how Rahel and Estha are still trapped inside their memories even after twenty-three years, as if time stopped for them at the place where Rahel's watch lies buried.*

Rahel walks around Ayemenem and Comrade Pillai greets her, asking about her husband and America. She shocks him by saying she is divorced, and then Pillai boasts about his son Lenin, who works in a foreign embassy. Rahel remembers Lenin as a child, one day when both Rahel and Lenin were at the doctor's office because they each had objects lodged in their noses – Rahel a glass bead and Lenin a bean. Rahel blew her nose one last desperate time and dislodged the bead just before the nurse called for her. Back in the present Comrade Pillai shows Rahel an old photograph of Lenin, Estha, Sophie Mol, and Rahel herself, taken only days before Sophie died.

*The divide between the upper class Rahel and the lower class Lenin was apparent even in the kinds of things they stuck up their noses. Time does indeed seem preserved in Ayemenem, as the same characters haunt the same places and are eager to show old photographs – another medium where time is frozen at a single moment. Rahel has also become a "disgraced woman" by being divorced, as the same kinds of standards and prejudices are still preserved in Ayemenem.*

## CHAPTER 6: COCHIN KANGAROOS

Back in 1969, it is the day of Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma's arrival at the Cochin Airport. Ammu dresses Rahel in a special dress, and Rahel feels like an "Airport Fairy" ready for the "play" they have been rehearsing for: being on their best behavior to impress Sophie Mol. Rahel notices four life-sized kangaroo statues (with trashcan pouches) in the Arrivals Lounge as the family waits.

*Estha and Rahel take on different epithets throughout the story, as if they are playing dress-up with their identities. Later this will be a kind of coping mechanism. The family has idealized Sophie Mol to a ridiculous degree already, and they want to impress her English sensibilities.*

Baby Kochamma tells the twins that they are "Ambassadors of India" so they must be on their best behavior. Rahel digs through the kangaroo trashcans and Estha is distracted by frightened thoughts of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Finally Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma arrive, and everyone greets each other politely, saying only "Small Things" and leaving the "Big Things" unsaid. Chacko is proud and excited to see his ex-wife and daughter, and he starts introducing everyone. Sophie is wearing yellow bell-bottoms and is "loved from the beginning."

*This is the first time the narrator specifically references the Big Things and the Small Things, the former lurking inside, the other on the surface. Baby Kochamma is only concerned that the twins behave well and impress Sophie Mol. The way the narrator describes Sophie as "loved from the beginning" shows how jealous the twins are of her, as she naturally receives all the love they crave.*

Estha is momentarily distracted by a famous comedian purposefully dropping his luggage nearby, and Baby Kochamma tries to impress Sophie Mol by referencing Shakespeare. When Chacko introduces Estha, Estha refuses to say "how do you do" and Ammu furiously promises him a punishment later. Meanwhile Rahel has disappeared behind a curtain and won't come out, as she is afraid of Ammu's anger and the moth on her own heart.

*The twins are overcome by the sudden change in the family and the "play" of impressing Sophie Mol, Estha because of his recent trauma and Rahel because of her fear that Ammu loves her less. This only leads Ammu to get angrier with them, however.*

Chacko picks up Sophie Mol until she asks him to put her down, and then they go to get her luggage. Estha coaxes Rahel out from the curtain and Ammu berates the twins about disobeying her in public. Baby Kochamma scorns her management of the children, but Ammu says they don't need a Baba because she loves them "Double."

*Chacko immediately gives Sophie Mol the affection the twins want, but Sophie Mol scorns it. Ammu's fierce love for her children also comes from her desire to prove that a woman can raise children without a man.*

Ammu then sends the twins off to say hello properly, and they talk briefly with Sophie Mol. Sophie says that she loves Joe the most of anyone, and she doesn't think of Chacko as her dad. Rahel then recites her list of who she loves most, which goes Ammu, Chacko, Mammachi, Velutha, and then Sophie Mol (even though they've never met until now). She doesn't include Estha because the twins "don't count."

*Rahel's practiced list of who she loves shows two important things – that what she and Estha share is more than love, more like two halves of one person, and that Rahel, like the other Ipes, has been taught to put social obligation over personal love. Thus Rahel is supposed to love Sophie Mol, even though they've never met.*

Everyone gets into the Plymouth and starts the trip back to Ayemenem. On the way they pass a dead elephant, but they are relieved to see it isn't Kochu Thomban (Little Tusker), the Ayemenem temple elephant who comes to their house sometimes. Baby Kochamma makes the twins sing a song to show off their English pronunciation.

*The huge changes that are coming with Sophie Mol's arrival seem foreshadowed by this omen of a dead elephant, a "Big Thing." Baby Kochamma still sticks to the "script" she has practiced for impressing Sophie.*

## CHAPTER 7: WISDOM EXERCISE NOTEBOOKS

In 1993 Rahel looks through Pappachi's study, where mounted moths and butterflies have disintegrated into dust. Rahel reaches into her old hiding place behind a book and finds Baby Kochamma's rosary, which Rahel stole twenty-three years before. Estha appears in the doorway but doesn't say anything. Then Rahel finds that Ammu had hidden something there as well, four old "Wisdom Exercise Notebooks" that the six-year-old twins had used to practice their writing.

*The adult twins act like the reader, looking through small things that signify the larger events of the family's past. The Ayemenem House has become a "History House" of its own, where Pappachi's moth and the twins' childhood have been preserved despite their long absence.*

Rahel reads through the notebooks and laughs at their childlike stories. Under many of them Ammu had written corrections, and the narrator muses how Ammu never finished her "corrections" in her own life. The story shifts to years earlier, the last time Ammu came back to Ayemenem, years after Chacko had kicked her out and she had no "Locusts Stand I" (*Locus standi*: legal standing).

*"Locusts Stand I" is another example of free indirect discourse, as Roy never actually explains what the phrase means, but only narrates it as the twins perceive it. After the events of 1969, Ammu's decline is swift and tragic.*

On this last visit Ammu had just been fired from her receptionist job for being sick too often, and Rahel had just been expelled from a school. Ammu bought Rahel presents fit for a seven-year-old, as if she could freeze her daughter in time. Ammu had a rattle in her throat and kept coughing up phlegm. They had lunch with Mammachi and Chacko, and Mammachi suggested that Ammu not visit anymore. Ammu left the table in silence and Rahel refused to go after her.

*Ammu joins the Ipe tradition of trying to preserve a moment in time forever as she tries to keep Rahel a child. Ammu has some kind of lung disease, probably tuberculosis. Mammachi as usual is more concerned with the social perception of the family than with her own daughter's health.*

Rahel never saw Ammu alive after that. Ammu died alone in a lodge at age thirty-one. She had been dreaming about policemen coming to cut off her hair to mark her as a *veshya*, a prostitute. The church wouldn't bury Ammu, so Rahel and Chacko took her to a crematorium. Chacko tried to hold Rahel's hand as Ammu disappeared into the machine, but Rahel slipped away. Rahel did not tell Estha about Ammu, as it would have been too strange – like writing a letter to her own body.

*Ammu's demise will be all the more tragic when we learn more details of her life and downfall. This is the second time the word "veshya" has been associated with Ammu, the first being when the policemen called her a prostitute in Ayemenem. Rahel acknowledges her special relationship with Estha, but they can be no comfort to each other in their separation.*

## CHAPTER 8: WELCOME HOME, OUR SOPHIE MOL

Back in the Ayemenem house, Mammachi waits patiently for the family to return. Mammachi is basically blind, and she plays her violin and remembers her first batch of professional pickles. They looked beautiful but the bottles leaked, and even after years of adjustments Paradise Pickles' bottles still leak some.

*The symbol of Paradise Pickles grows more complex, as the pickle jars leak despite Mammachi's attempts at perfectly preserving her foods. In the same way the family will break social taboos even as they try to cling to old traditions.*

Mammachi then thinks of Margaret Kochamma, whom she has never met but despises anyway. Mammachi hates her for her working-class background and for marrying Chacko. The day Chacko stopped Pappachi from beating Mammachi, Chacko became Mammachi's "only Love." She forgives his affairs with his factory workers, calling them "Men's Needs." Mammachi even built a separate entrance to Chacko's room, so his "Needs" didn't have to go through the house, and she pays his lovers so they seem more like prostitutes to her.

*Mammachi transfers all her feelings, even romantic ones, from Pappachi to Chacko, so her hatred of Margaret is also jealousy. Mammachi condoning Chacko's "Men's Needs" is tragically hypocritical considering Ammu's disgrace and exile. Mammachi sees the world in strict divides of class, so by considering Margaret "working-class" and Chacko's lovers "prostitutes" she makes it easier to scorn and hate them.*

In the kitchen Kochu Maria writes "WELCOME HOME OUR SOPHIE MOL" on a huge cake. Kochu Maria is very short and bad-tempered. Despite her lowly job, she is proud of being a Syrian Christian and a Touchable, and she holds grudges against those she thinks have insulted her – like Estha saying "*Et tu*, Kochu Maria?"

*Like Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria relies solely on her heritage as a source of pride and superiority. Even though she is of a lower class like the laborers and Untouchables, she still hates and scorns them instead of empathizing with them.*

The Plymouth pulls into Ayemenem and everyone stops working to gather around the car. The children get out of the car and Rahel realizes she is an unnecessary part of the "Play" now, as everyone is just there to see Sophie Mol. Chacko introduces Sophie and Margaret to Mammachi, and again "only the Small Things" are said.

*The Ipes are indeed all Anglophiles, as they fawn over and practically worship Sophie Mol for her whiteness. The child's point of view sees the small talk and politeness for what it is, an elaborate play to impress Sophie and Margaret.*

Velutha approaches the outskirts of the crowd and Rahel slips away to play with him. Velutha tosses her up and down and Ammu watches them together, admiring Velutha's bare torso and smile. She suddenly hopes that Velutha *was* actually in the march, that he also has a hidden anger under his cheerful exterior.

*Despite his low caste, Velutha is beloved by the children for his willingness to share in their fantasies and his kindness in "small things." Ammu sees Velutha as a man for the first time, a sexual being, and she hopes that he shares her anger at the unjust society that oppresses both of them.*

Velutha notices Ammu's gaze, and history is "caught off guard." Velutha notices "simple things," such as the fact that Ammu is now a woman, and that perhaps she has things to offer him now, just as he had built her little toys when they were children. Then they look away and history returns with its "Love Laws."

*This is one of the important small moments of the book, when the largeness of "history" is condensed into an instant. Again small things, like the little toys Velutha makes, bring an intimacy to something huge like breaking a caste taboo.*

Velutha goes back to playing with Rahel, and he denies being in the march when she accuses him. Velutha says it was probably his long-lost twin brother "Urumban." Meanwhile Kochu Maria brings out the giant cake and admires Sophie Mol's beauty in Malayalam (she doesn't speak English). Kochu Maria sniffs Sophie Mol's hands and Margaret Kochamma insensitively asks if that is how men and women kiss here too. Ammu responds sarcastically, saying she feels like part of a "tribe that's just been discovered," and storms out.

*Velutha introduces Urumban to playfully distract Rahel and avoid causing trouble at the factory, but later the twins will use this imaginary twin to deal with and deny Velutha's brutal death. Ammu also sees the "Play" for what it is, but she understands the racist implications of this idolizing of whiteness and sees that the Ipes are basically "exoticizing" themselves.*

No one knows where Ammu learned her rebelliousness and feminism, as she hadn't been taught or read about it. She learned it from her father, who acted like a charitable gentleman to the public but then in private was abusive, cruel, and sadistic to Ammu and Mammachi. Ammu remembers one night when Pappachi beat her and then shredded her favorite boots. After years of this cruelty, Ammu grew to almost enjoy confrontations and being put down by "Someone Big."

*Ammu shares Roy's anger against the injustice in much of Indian society, where a man can get away with promiscuous affairs (like Chacko) and violence (like Pappachi), but a woman must accept disgrace and abuse without complaint. At this stage in her life Ammu has almost "nothing to lose," and so she feels no qualms about speaking her indignation aloud.*

After Ammu leaves, Kochu Maria cuts the cake and serves a piece to everyone while Mammachi plays the violin. Ammu calls from the house for Rahel to come in for her "Afternoon Gnap." Baby Kochamma notices Velutha being "over-familiar," and she warns that he will be the family's "Nemesis" just because she wants to get him in trouble.

*The spelling of "Afternoon Gnap" is another example of free indirect discourse, where the narrator describes small things in the way the twins see them. Baby Kochamma is not being prophetic about Velutha, but only bitter and jealous.*

Kochu Maria boasts to Rahel that Sophie Mol will be the next Kochamma and make everything better, and Rahel gets angry and goes to kill some ants. Sophie Mol leaves the "Play" and watches Rahel. She suggests that they leave one ant alive so "it can be lonely," but Rahel ignores her and runs away.

*Sophie Mol first begins to escape her caricature as "perfect white niece" and become a human that the twins will later befriend. Rahel is still jealous of all the attention Sophie gets, and afraid of losing Ammu's love.*

## CHAPTER 9: MRS. PILLAI, MRS. EAPEN, MRS. RAJAGOPALAN

In 1993, Rahel explores the abandoned ornamental garden and thinks about how she has no plans or "Locusts Stand I" now. Rahel remembers Sophie Mol telling Chacko that she loved him less than Joe, and Sophie Mol being lonely when the twins left her out. After that Estha and Rahel took Sophie to see Velutha, each of them in makeup and pretending to be ladies, and he made them wooden spoons. The adult Rahel muses on Velutha's sweetness, how he always went along with the childrens' fantasies.

*We are given only these memories and summaries to fully humanize Sophie Mol and Velutha, as they have few specific scenes before their tragedies strike. Velutha is almost like the narrator, slipping into a kind of "free indirect discourse" when the children are around, seeing the world as they do, finding the fantastic in small things.*

Rahel watches Estha in his room and thinks about the twins' troubled past, which she thinks of as "the Terror." She wishes she and Estha could think of themselves as victims, not perpetrators, but she knows there was only one true victim that day: Velutha. Rahel hears the drums announcing a *kathakali* performance and heads towards the History House. On her way she steps into the abandoned remains of Paradise Pickles, and thinks about how "things can change in a day."

*Roy juxtaposes these scenes of innocence and sweetness with memories of brutality and tragedy to heighten the story's drama. Once again we ostensibly know the "end" of the story – Velutha becomes an innocent victim – but we don't know how the plot arrives there. It is ironic that Rahel walks past the pickle factory as she repeats the refrain about change.*

## CHAPTER 10: THE RIVER IN THE BOAT

In 1969, while the "Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol" cake is being served, Estha slips away and walks into Paradise Pickles to think. The factory is empty except for Ousa the "Bar Nowl." Estha walks among shelves of preserved fruits and vegetables and he stirs a cauldron of banana jam, thinking about the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and how he could show up at any minute.

*The childlike part of the narrator's voice not only spells things wrong but also emphasizes animal life, the small things that live alongside human dramas – like the bat at Sophie Mol's funeral, Kochu Thomban the elephant, or Ousa the owl. Estha's trauma has far-reaching effects.*

As he stirs the jam Estha thinks "Two Thoughts" – "Anything can happen to anyone" and "It's best to be prepared." Then he starts wishing for a boat to row across the river, so that he could escape the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man if he came. Rahel enters the factory but Estha tries to ignore her. Finally he tells her his plan – he wants to go to the History House across the river.

*These Two Thoughts are emphasized often as small things that lead to actions of great importance. Estha wants to make a hideout in case the Orangedrink Man shows up, and this leads to the History House becoming the scene of both love and violence.*

The last person who claimed to have seen Kari Saipu's house was Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father. He said he saw Kari Saipu's ghost while he was looking for a nutmeg tree, and he threw his sickle at the ghost and pinned it to a tree. Supposedly it remains there still, asking passersby for cigars.

*This story adds an element of the fantastic to how the children see the world, and will later give them a way to supernaturally explain the tragic events of the History House.*

Vellya Paapen does not know that Estha and Rahel think of Kari Saipu's house as the "History House," though, or that it is there that history will destroy his son and "capture the dreams" of the twins. Estha stirs the jam and he and Rahel come up with a plan to become Communists (so they don't have to believe in ghosts) and then visit the History House while Ammu is napping.

*Roy uses "history" in different ways, commenting on the English colonization of India as a "stealing and redreaming" of Indian dreams, and also focusing the history of caste divides and class struggles into a few poignant, dramatic moments.*

Rahel goes in for her "Gnap" and lies awake until Ammu falls asleep. She imagines Estha waiting for her by the river (holding the Marxist flag that Baby Kochamma was forced to wave) and then she somehow perceives that he is sitting on an old overturned boat. Rahel gets up and runs down to the river, and the children discover that it is indeed a boat, leaky and overgrown with plants. The twins think about their river (which is called the Meenachal) – the familiar part, then the "Really Deep," and then the shallows where eels live.

*The Marxist flag becomes another small thing that symbolizes a big thing – this kind of metaphor is called "metonymy." The twins again share a mystical connection as Rahel discovers the boat that Estha is sitting on without actually seeing it. Rivers are often images of baptism or rebirth, and Estha does indeed long for the Meenachal to cleanse him after he is molested. The twins love the river, but they don't understand its danger yet.*

The twins put the boat in the water and it sinks, so they decide to clean it and carry it to Velutha. When they get to his hut Velutha and Vellya Paapen aren't there, but Velutha's paralyzed brother Kuttappen is. He stays in the corner all day and remains a "good, safe Paravan" who can't read or write. The twins enter the hut and talk with Kuttappen about Sophie Mol and the boat. Kuttappen warns them about the river, as it can sometimes be a "wild thing."

*Vellya Paapen and Kuttappen both accept the shame and self-hatred that Untouchability is supposed to include. Velutha, on the other hand, has a secret anger in him against the unjust caste system. Kuttappen's warning, combined with the earlier description of the Meenachal, is a foreshadowing of tragedy.*

Estha and Rahel start singing an obscene song and Estha momentarily forgets the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Velutha returns and finds that he thinks of Ammu when he sees the twins now. He joins in their make-believe and then helps them fix the boat. Velutha takes a break and goes in to see Kuttappen, who asks him about the Communist march. Velutha knows he should be afraid that the Ipes saw him, and he tries to hate Ammu as "one of them," but he can't.

*Velutha shows his kindness again by immediately helping the twins. Ammu and Velutha's fate seems sealed by that one glance they shared, and they cannot escape the tragedy that awaits them. Velutha confirms that he was indeed in the march, showing that beyond his playful, kindly exterior he does have the sense of indignation toward the injustices of society that Ammu had hoped for.*

## CHAPTER 11: THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Meanwhile Ammu is still napping, and she dreams about a beautiful one-armed man who can only do one small thing at a time. Wherever she touches him she leaves goosebumps on his skin. She imagines people watching them, and the twins hovering over her. Ammu thinks of the man as the "God of Small Things," and wonders who he is.

*This figure is clearly Velutha, whom Ammu had been admiring moments before. In this dream Roy connects Velutha's forbidden love with the theme of "small things." He can only do one thing at a time in loving Ammu, just as stories and history only consist of one small moment after another.*

In real life the twins are actually standing over the sleeping Ammu, worried that she is having a nightmare and trying to wake her up by making loud noises. Finally Ammu wakes up and says she was happy in the dream. Estha asks her if happiness in a dream "counts."

*Estha's question is important, a childlike, innocent way of asking whether emotions felt in dreams or fantasies count as emotions in real life. To Roy the answer is yes, as many of the truths of her story are revealed by a childlike imagination.*

Ammu turns on the radio and it is playing a song about star-crossed lovers lost at sea. She notices that the twins are covered with sawdust, and she warns them about going to Velutha's house, but she doesn't say his name. Somehow this makes a sort of pact between the three of them, with the twins as "midwives" of her dream. Ammu knows then that the God of Small Things is Velutha.

*Just as Velutha did, Ammu now seems to recognize her inevitable fate and doomed love. As the twins hovered over her in her dream and loved Velutha before she did, they seem as co-conspirators in Ammu's taboo desires. Because of this they will also share in her punishment.*

Estha and Rahel start to climb all over Ammu's body and kiss her, trying to bring her back from the dream-world. Ammu eventually gets up and looks at herself in the bathroom mirror. She examines her body and thinks about what the future holds for her, the dreadful monotony of a disgraced, man-less woman in Ayemenem.

*In this moment of self-reflection, Ammu seems to recognize that her wilder, fiercer self will eventually rebel against the monotonous aging of a woman like Baby Kochamma. The bleakness of her future seems to justify a forbidden relationship with Velutha.*

While Ammu is in the bathroom, the narrator elaborates on the bedroom (where Estha and Rahel still are), which Ammu would later be locked into until Chacko broke down the door and kicked her out of the house. The narrator muses on the small things in that scene – Ammu hemming a ribbon, wood splintering around her. It is also the same bedroom where Ammu would pack up Estha's things before "returning" him.

*In the story, the rooms of the Ayemenem House become places like the History House, where various moments are preserved forever. The narrator looks forward and backward at once, and so sees all the seemingly fragmentary events that happened in that one room come together to form a narrative.*

## CHAPTER 12: KOCHU THOMBAN

In 1993 Rahel approaches the Ayemenem temple, where the *kathakali* performers are asking forgiveness of the gods for their tourist-friendly act at the hotel. Kochu Thomban, the Ayemenem elephant, is tethered outside. Rahel enters the temple, where the story has already begun. This doesn't matter, because the "Great Stories" are already familiar, yet you still want to hear them over and over. The narrator describes the Kathakali Men who tell stories of the gods, love, and obscenity. These days kathakali is no longer a viable career path, so the performers have turned to tourism.

*The Kerala that Roy portrays in 1993 is quiet but stagnant, living in the aftermath of political upheaval and personal trauma. The great Hindu myths and the deeds of the History House are now repackaged for tourist consumption, losing their complexity and tragedy. The kathakali story begins in the middle, the "Great Stories" cycling back over themselves in a similar way to the novel.*

Rahel watches the story of Karna, and the actor playing Karna is high. She muses that his struggle is not to portray the part but to escape it – he is already Karna, the god whom the world abandons, who was raised in poverty. In the story, Kunti, Karna's mother, appears and reveals how after he was born she put him in a reed basket and sent him down the river, as she was unmarried and couldn't keep the baby.

*Karna is associated with Velutha in that he is abandoned and betrayed by the world and even his own family. The baby in the reed basket is similar to the Biblical story of Moses, but also to Ammu "returning" Estha because she can't afford to keep him.*

Karna joyfully reunites with his mother, but then he learns that Kunti is only there to make him promise not to kill his brothers, who had insulted him. Rahel then notices that Estha has entered the temple as well. They stay all night as the performance continues, ending with Bhima and his bloody quest for vengeance. As the performer brutally "kills" Bhima's rival Dushasana, the twins recognize the mad violence as the same violence from the Terror.

*Bhima must kill Dushasana because Bhima's wife had promised to wash her hair in Dushasana's blood (he had humiliated her earlier by dragging her by the hair). The madness of extreme violence, the point where someone becomes ecstatic in their brutality, reminds both twins of Velutha's death.*

Dawn breaks and Comrade Pillai wakes up, greeting the twins as they pass by on their way home. Ironically it was Pillai who first introduced them to kathakali, and the story of Bhima who searches for "the beast that lives in him." The narrator muses that men are more savage than any beast.

*Roy begins to foreshadow violence and tragedy in a more specific way, now that the "Terror" approaches in the narrative. Again the narrator points out unlikely connections between characters and events.*

## CHAPTER 13: THE PESSIMIST AND THE OPTIMIST

In 1969 Sophie Mol wakes up and thinks about Joe. She and Margaret Kochamma are staying in Chacko's room, and Sophie looks around at the broken airplanes, thinking that her mother was the only one to escape and fly away. She sees a picture of her mother and Chacko on their wedding day.

*Sophie Mol finally gets her own voice, as she becomes more of a real character and less of the ideal of which Rahel is jealous . The tragedy is that Sophie doesn't consider the Ipes her family at all, as she doesn't think of Chacko as her father.*

The narrator explains Chacko and Margaret Kochamma's relationship. Margaret was working as a waitress in London when Chacko came to her café one day. He was slim then and looked like a disheveled intellectual. He told Margaret a joke as she served him, and then he started coming back to the café to see her. They began to date, and Margaret felt her "horizons expanding," and she confused her growing self-acceptance with love for Chacko.

*Chacko, like the other Ipes, is an Anglophile, so he both loved Margaret and was proud to be dating a white woman. This is one of the healthier relationships in the book (as there is no violence at least), but Margaret Kochamma confuses her self-love with love for Chacko, while his devotion to her is full and intense.*

Chacko loved Margaret's English self-sufficiency. He rarely spoke about his home to her, as it seemed so small and unreal, and even on his visit where he stopped Pappachi from beating Mammachi he was still in a "trance" of love. He and Margaret got married against Margaret's family's consent, and Chacko didn't even tell his family.

*What meant the world to Mammachi was just a passing exchange for Chacko, who is trying to escape Ayemenem both emotionally and intellectually. We see a small glimpse of English racism in the fact that Margaret's family disapproves of Chacko.*

They soon had financial troubles and Chacko got very fat, and Margaret's parents wouldn't speak to her. Then she met Joe, who was the opposite of Chacko. Chacko finally wrote to Mammachi about his marriage and asked her for money. After Sophie was born, Margaret asked Chacko for a divorce. The brokenhearted Chacko returned to India and started teaching at a college.

*Chacko does not seem to reciprocate Mammachi's desperate affection, as he only tells her about his marriage to ask for financial help. Margaret's parents are insistent in their disapproval of Chacko because he is Indian, just as Mammachi disapproves of Margaret for her class.*

When Pappachi died, Chacko moved back to Ayemenem to become a "pickle baron." He purposefully seemed to cultivate his sloth and bad habits just because he knew Mammachi adored him despite everything. Margaret Kochamma would write him about Joe and Sophie Mol. She still thought of Chacko as an "extraordinary man," so she didn't realize how much she had hurt him.

*Despite his Marxist intellectual ideas, Chacko still hoped to profit off of his family's high class and his mother's relentless doting. Margaret, meanwhile, seems to have found a better relationship with Joe. Despite all his privilege and support, Chacko is basically a case of potential being squandered.*

Margaret Kochamma was working as a teacher when Joe died in an accident, and she dealt with her grief by sticking to a strict routine for herself and Sophie Mol. She relented when Chacko invited her to Ayemenem for the holidays, however. The narrator then jumps ahead, saying that Margaret Kochamma never forgave herself for taking Sophie to India. She and Chacko had been buying plane tickets in Cochin, and when they returned to Ayemenem she saw Sophie Mol's drowned, fish-nibbled body laid out in the drawing room.

*Margaret Kochamma is not explored deeply as a character, but she experiences just as much tragedy as anyone in the novel and has her own familial relations and obligations. Once again Roy shifts the narrative so that it spirals inward on the climactic moments of the story, returning to images like Sophie's body without explaining the circumstances of her death yet.*

The morning of Sophie Mol's death all three of the children had been missing for breakfast, Ammu was locked in her bedroom, and the river was swollen with a recent rain. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma got news that a fisherman had found Sophie Mol's body, and then Ammu remembered what she had yelled through the door in her blind rage: she had called the twins "millstones around her neck" and told them to leave her alone.

*Just as Rahel's careless words cause her to fear Ammu loves her less, so Ammu's angry words partially set the events of the "Terror" in motion. Past events come together, mostly Estha and Rahel's fear of being unwanted by Ammu, and the hideout they have created at the History House to escape the Orangedrink Man.*

The previous afternoon Kochu Maria is cleaning a fish when Vellya Paapen shows up outside, drunk and crying in the heavy rain. Kochu Maria gets Mammachi, and Vellya Paapen begins listing all the great things Mammachi's family had done for his family. Then "the Terror" takes over and he tells Mammachi what he has seen – Velutha and Ammu are lovers, and they take a little boat across the river every night to Kari Saipu's house. He says others have seen too, and the whole village knows by now.

*The two tragic events that become linked by circumstance are Sophie Mol's accidental death and Velutha's purposeful one. Vellya Paapen is the ultimate example of familial love doing battle with social obligation. He loves his son dearly, but he also has all the shame and sense of duty of an Untouchable, and he feels he owes the Ipes and society for anything good he has.*

Mammachi is filled with rage and she screams at Vellya Paapen and shoves him away from her, forgetting his Untouchability. Baby Kochamma hears the commotion and appears, and Kochu Maria tells her the story. Baby Kochamma immediately "blooms," seeing all this as righteous punishment for Ammu, the twins, and Velutha. Baby Kochamma tells Mammachi they must send Velutha away before the family is ruined.

*Mammachi too breaks the social taboo by touching Vellya Paapen, though for her the emotions pushing her across the caste divide are anger and hate, not love. Baby Kochamma suddenly becomes a more important character, as her petty, jealous hand guides the Terror along. Self-centered as always, she sees herself as a martyr, and feels no guilt for her actions.*

Baby Kochamma makes a little comment to Mammachi about the smell of Paravans, and at that Mammachi's rage "unspooled." She imagines her daughter and an Untouchable together and the shame Ammu has brought on the family forever. She, Baby Kochamma, and Kochu Maria trick Ammu into her bedroom and lock her inside, and then they send for Velutha, planning to get him to leave before Chacko returns from Chochin. But by then Sophie Mol's body has been found.

*Again it is a single small phrase that sets huge events in motion. In reality such divides as caste are meaningless and are even abolished by the Indian government, but in Mammachi's mind and the small, traditional community of Ayemenem these roles are everything. Mammachi automatically chooses her social duty over any kind of loyalty to Ammu.*

The narrator describes the fisherman finding the body of a white child that morning, and realizing that one can never underestimate the Meenachal river. Afterward Baby Kochamma goes to the police station, where she tells Inspector Thomas Mathew that Velutha came to the house and tried to rape Ammu the night before. She says the disappearance of the children and Sophie Mol's death must be his fault as well. She goes into the details and her imagination takes over, and Mathew believes her story. He is very helpful and only worried when she says Velutha might be a Naxalite.

*In this first lie Baby Kochamma basically sacrifices Velutha to preserve the Ipe family honor. She assumes that Ammu will also be deathly ashamed of the taboo relationship, so Baby Kochamma just tries to "simplify things" and spare the family any more humiliation. The juxtaposition of this traditional mindset with the threat of Velutha's Naxalite ties shows how the Ipes are totally self-absorbed, unaware of the revolutionary things happening beyond Ayemenem.*

Inspector Thomas Mathew comforts the "weeping" Baby Kochamma and promises to catch Velutha soon. After she leaves he sends for Comrade Pillai to make sure that Velutha doesn't have any important political connections. The narrator describes both men as "terrifyingly adult," the kind of people who control the machine of the world. Pillai says Velutha is on his own, and he doesn't tell Mathew that Velutha had showed up at his house last night.

*Both Pillai and Mathew use Velutha like a chess piece in their political game instead of like a human. Mathew wants to punish Velutha to send a message that the divide between Touchables and Untouchables is not to be crossed, and to preserve the status quo. Pillai could support Velutha as a Party member, but instead he betrays him for being an Untouchable.*

When Baby Kochamma returns to the house Chacko and Margaret Kochamma have gotten back from Chochin. Margaret sees Sophie Mol's body laid out on the chaise lounge and she goes insane with grief. She only vaguely remembers the following days: Chacko's presence, the funeral, and Ammu's eviction from the house.

*Margaret Kochamma experiences her own horrible tragedies, but she is exempt from the political and social forces that destroy the rest of the family.*

Margaret Kochamma comes to irrationally hate Estha and Rahel for surviving, and in her grief she connects Estha with Sophie Mol's death – which is unknowingly prescient, considering it was Estha's idea to run away and he who rowed the boat. In her trauma she finds Estha a few times and slaps him. It is only after she returns to England that she sends a letter apologizing for her behavior, but by then Estha has been sent away to Baba. And Margaret never knew anything at all about what happened to Velutha, "the God of Small Things."

*In her grief Margaret Kochamma blames the twins, which only adds to the guilt they already feel – mostly built up by Baby Kochamma, as we will see. Roy puts everything in perspective here. Margaret runs from the trauma of her daughter's death and eventually gains some level of insight, but the twins can't escape as Margaret does, and they must face what she never has to: what happened to Velutha.*

The narrator then jumps back to two weeks before, as Sophie Mol wakes up and digs through Margaret Kochamma's bags – Margaret has packed everything, just in case, for her trip to "the Heart of Darkness." Sophie finds her presents for her cousins and goes out to "negotiate a friendship." Unfortunately it would be a brief friendship, and the "Loss of Sophie Mol" would live much longer than Sophie Mol herself.

*Sophie Mol only begins to exist as a character in the novel just before she dies. Roy seems to point out this brief characterization by bringing up the "Loss of Sophie Mol" again, which to the twins is a more important, potent thing than Sophie Mol herself was. The ideas and memories of people and events can be become more important or powerful than the people themselves.*

## CHAPTER 14: WORK IS STRUGGLE

The narrative moves to Chacko on his way to Comrade Pillai's house (that same day, two weeks before Sophie Mol's death). Comrade Pillai is temporarily away, but his wife lets Chacko in. Over the door is a sign saying "Work is Struggle. Struggle is Work." Mrs. Pillai is very beautiful, but Chacko notes that this is the first time he isn't attracted to her – his mind is full of Margaret Kochamma again.

*Roy deals with the political aspects of Velutha's tragedy in this chapter, and Comrade Pillai becomes a more important character. Many people in Ayemenem seem to have had a hand in the "Terror," and yet in 1993 they are still preserving the past and the "Loss of Sophie Mol."*

Mrs. Pillai calls for her niece Latha to recite an English poem for Chacko. Comrade Pillai arrives mid-poem, and he takes off his sweaty shirt and hands it to his wife, who accepts it like "a bouquet of flowers." After the poem Comrade Pillai sends for some other villagers so as many people as possible will see Chacko at his house – Pillai is an aspiring politician and trying to extend his influence.

*This short scene allows Roy to show the dynamic of a family in Ayemenem other than the Ipes and Velutha's family. Mrs. Pillai is a "dutiful" wife in that she both adores her husband and practically acts as his servant. Pillai is an opportunist, and tries to bend any situation to serve his own ambition.*

Comrade Pillai's young son Lenin enters and sits in front of his father. Pillai and Chacko make small talk and Pillai boasts about his son's genius. Chacko realizes that Pillai's obvious poverty and "proximity to the toiling masses" makes Chacko the weaker one in this situation. He orders some new labels for Paradise Pickles and then asks Pillai about the march, and whether Velutha was there.

*Pillai sees things clearly in this encounter and knows that he has more power than Chacko in the current political climate, especially if he can organize the workers at the pickle factory. Pillai also feels no qualms about taking Chacko's money at the same time he plans Chacko's overthrow.*

Comrade Pillai suggests that Chacko send Velutha away, as the other workers are uncomfortable with his caste. Chacko says that Velutha basically runs the factory, so he is indispensable. Pillai suggests that the workers form a Union, and says that Chacko cannot "stage their revolution for them." In this way Pillai gets a contract for printing labels and at the same time makes Chacko into the Oppressor, earning a victory in their subtle battle of wills.

*Comrade Pillai knows that Communism will only be successful in this area if it sticks to the status quo regarding castes, focusing instead on the revolution of Touchable laborers. His ideals are less powerful than his ambition. Chacko is still distracted from the situation and thinks he can have the best of both worlds.*

The narrator jumps ahead, explaining that Comrade Pillai would indeed be victorious, but his revolution would come too quickly and easily to be successful. After Sophie Mol's death Chacko basically abandoned Paradise Pickles in his grief, and Comrade Pillai realized then that he needed "the process of war" more than a swift victory.

*This is basically the political result of Velutha's tragedy, and we see in 1993 that Comrade Pillai is still living in Ayemenem, rather than having ascended to greater political power. His immediate victory led to nothing more.*

On the night of Sophie Mol's death Velutha is returning from having a canning machine fixed. He gets to Ayemenem and Mammachi sends for him. Velutha goes straight there instead of going home, where Vellya Paapen is waiting with an axe. Velutha arrives at the Ayemenem house and Mammachi screams insults at him for a while, her anger encouraged by Baby Kochamma. Finally Mammachi spits in his face and Velutha leaves, stunned.

*Vellya Paapen is serious in his threat to kill his own son to spare the Ipes further dishonor. From this point on Velutha basically acts as if in a trance – he cannot escape his destiny and the huge forces of history. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma exhibit an especially personal cruelty. Meanwhile, the one they spurn is actually fixing a canning machine, suggesting that Velutha is the one who could in fact help the family preserve what is important.*

Velutha is in shock and his mind focuses on small details of his surroundings. He goes to Comrade Pillai's house and asks for his help, but Pillai says that the Party will not protect Velutha. Pillai repeats a few slogans and sends Velutha away. Velutha walks to the river in a trance, as if history itself is leading him on.

*Velutha, true to his title, notices the small things as he walks instead of trying to grasp the whole story at once. His only hope in battling the forces of history and preservation is Marxism, the force of revolution and change, but Pillai abandons Velutha as well.*

## CHAPTER 15: THE CROSSING

Velutha swims across the river and heads towards the History House, thinking that things will get worse but then better.

*Like Sophie Mol, Velutha only begins to be characterized before he is killed. The "Loss of Velutha" will haunt the twins like Sophie Mol haunts Ayemenem.*

## CHAPTER 16: A FEW HOURS LATER

A few hours later Estha and Rahel decide to run away, taking to heart Ammu's words that they are "millstones around her neck." Estha has already equipped the History House with supplies in case he had to go there to escape the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Sophie Mol convinces them to take her along, as she says the absence of any children in the house will make the adults sadder.

*Having expanded on the "Big Things," Roy now returns to the children and the intimate aspects of tragedy. The small past events of the story begin to come together and lead to this particular situation.*

The three go down to the river and get into their boat. The river is faster and stronger than they expected, and lots of debris floats past them. Then the boat hits a log and tips over. Estha and Rahel manage to swim to shore and grab a low-hanging tree, but Sophie Mol disappears. Rahel feels Pappachi's moth land on her heart as she realizes Sophie is probably drowned.

*This small moment and random accident is basically the climactic action of the book, even though it happens so quickly and quietly. It is what precedes and follows the moment that makes Sophie Mol's death a tragedy of such long-lasting scope.*

The narrator muses on the quickness and quietness of Sophie Mol's death. After searching hopelessly for her, the twins climb up to the History House and lie down, traumatized. They don't notice that Velutha is already sleeping there nearby.

*Even though Sophie Mol's death is a "Big Thing," the actual moment of it is a "small thing." The stage is now set for the Terror.*

## CHAPTER 17: COCHIN HARBOR TERMINUS

In 1993, Estha sits on his bed. Outside the old Plymouth has been abandoned and overgrown with vines. Baby Kochamma fills out a form for a Listerine coupon and writes in her diary "I love you I love you," as she does every day. Father Mulligan had died four years ago after converting to Hinduism, which offended Baby Kochamma, but she continues to possessively love the memory of him.

*Roy juxtaposes the tension and upheaval of 1969 with the quietness and stagnation of 1993. Baby Kochamma lives so much in the past that she no longer even loves the present Father Mulligan, but only an idealized memory of him.*

Meanwhile Rahel is lying on Estha's bed as he examines her body and face, which looks like Ammu. He remembers leaving her twenty-three years earlier, and the sights and sounds of the Cochin Harbor Terminus train station. He remembers Ammu being kicked out of the house, and the "thicklipped" man who was Estha's companion on the train, and Comrade Pillai's version of the Terror, which was printed in the newspaper: that "the Management" had framed Velutha because he was a party member, so after the police "Encounter" Comrade Pillai led an overthrow of Paradise Pickles.

*The political aftermath of the Terror is only illustrated in this memory of a newspaper article, showing that it was not important to the twins, whose lives had already been ruined. Though Pillai personally abandoned Velutha, he then used Velutha's death to incite a revolution. This revolution had no lasting effects for Pillai though, and he remains trapped in the "pickle factory" of Ayemenem.*

## CHAPTER 18: THE HISTORY HOUSE

Back in 1969, six Touchable policemen cross the river to look for Velutha. They walk through the jungle and the narrator describes all the little animals and plants they pass by with violence in their hearts. They come to the History House and fan out, feeling the responsibility of the "Touchable Future."

*Like Velutha passing through the same jungle, the narrator emphasizes the small things, the plant and animal life that lives alongside the arbitrary dramas of humanity. The policemen are not so much hunting a criminal as preserving the status quo.*

The twins and Velutha are all asleep when the police find them. They wake Velutha up by stomping him with their boots. The children wake up and realize for the first time that Velutha is there. The police kick him brutally, and the narrator explains that they are only "history's henchmen" acting out the inevitable. They are not really there to arrest Velutha, but to prove that the Touchable order of the world is still intact. The twins watch as Velutha is beaten almost to death, and his blood smells like old roses to them.

*This is the climactic tragedy of the novel, the violence that is not cherished and preserved like Sophie Mol's death. The police achieve that place beyond rage that the twins would later see in the story of Bhima, and again Roy steps back to examine the larger implications of this single moment. This is also the explanation for the smell of "old roses" that comes to haunt the twins.*

The police finally stop, and the narrator describes Velutha's broken body, which has been abandoned by "God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and… by Children." Rahel tells Estha that it isn't really Velutha, it's his twin brother Urumban, but Estha won't let himself believe this. The policemen suddenly grow friendly and tend to the children, making sure Velutha didn't hurt them. Then the police notice the childlike "supplies" and start to get worried – maybe Velutha didn't kidnap them after all – so they take all the toys for themselves, forgetting only Rahel's watch, and drag Velutha out of the forest.

*Though the twins are very young, Velutha seems the only truly innocent victim of the story. Rahel immediately tries to retreat into fantasy and ignore the enormous thing that she has seen. The police have dehumanized Velutha to such an extent that they can immediately go from beating him to helping the children. It is only when they consider that maybe Velutha is not an Untouchable kidnapping monster that they realize he might be human.*

## CHAPTER 19: SAVING AMMU

Afterward Estha and Rahel are at the police station with Inspector Thomas Mathew. They read the words on the signs backwards out loud, and he knows they are traumatized. After hearing about all the toys, Mathew knows something is wrong, and he sends for Baby Kochamma. He is not friendly to her this time. He explains that Velutha will probably die of his injuries, and so if Velutha did not actually kidnap the children this means the police have killed a basically innocent man.

*Like Pillai, Inspector Mathew is not concerned for Velutha as a human but only as a political tool. Mathew thought he was sending a message that the caste system would be upheld, but now he discovers that his own position could be compromised. The twins use their backwards reading now as a means of mentally escaping the situation.*

Inspector Mathew says that unless the "rape victim" (Ammu) files a complaint or the children identify Velutha as their kidnapper, Mathew will have to charge Baby Kochamma for false witness. Baby Kochamma is terrified, and she offers to try and convince the children to change their story. Mathew is worried about his own position, as he knows Velutha was a Communist Party member and that Comrade Pillai will exploit this incident.

*Baby Kochamma had seen herself as helping the Ipe family name, but now that she is in personal danger she is willing to sacrifice anything to save herself. Even though Pillai abandoned Velutha, he will use Velutha's death as a political tool to incite revolution and try to increase his own power.*

Inspector Mathew leaves Baby Kochamma alone with the twins, and she accuses them of murdering Sophie Mol. She says there is no forgiveness for this crime, and that they will have to go to jail and Ammu will too. She then describes the horrors of prison. The only way to lessen the damage done, she says, is to "save Ammu" from jail by answering "yes" when the police ask if Velutha kidnapped them and killed Sophie Mol. She tells them Velutha will die anyway, so it doesn't matter.

*Though Baby Kochamma was introduced at the novel's beginning, we only see the true extent of her sins now. She is basically willing to sacrifice the lives of Estha, Rahel, and Velutha to preserve her own safety and the Ipe family name. Baby Kochamma is able to weave convincing tales, and the twins helplessly go along with her, just wanting to escape in fantasy.*

Baby Kochamma ends her speech by posing the choice as "saving Ammu" or sending her to jail. The children say "Save Ammu," and the narrator wonders whether they were totally tricked into their betrayal, or if they also had a subconscious desire to preserve their own safety and order. In their later lives the twins would be tortured by this question. Baby Kochamma is delighted at her success, and she sends Estha alone with Inspector Mathew to testify.

*Baby Kochamma feels like she has fixed the situation, but for the twins this is the beginning of a lifetime of guilt. They were in shock and deceived by Baby Kochamma, but they also succumbed too easily to set their future consciences at ease. In a way they were like Baby Kochamma, willing to sacrifice a man's life to protect the family.*

Inspector Mathew takes Estha into the prison and Estha sees the bloody, broken Velutha. One of Velutha's eyes focuses on Estha just as the Inspector asks his question and Estha says "yes." At that "childhood tiptoed out" and "silence slid in." On the drive back home Estha tells Rahel she was right, it was actually Urumban, and Velutha had surely escaped to Africa. Velutha dies that night in the cell.

*This is perhaps the most tragic scene of the novel, as Estha betrays the dying Velutha to his face. It is this small thing, this little word "yes" that haunts Estha for the rest of his life and leads him eventually to stop speaking altogether. At the enormity of this tragedy Estha too tries to escape into Rahel's fantasy.*

When Ammu went to the police station after Sophie Mol's funeral, Baby Kochamma became terrified that her plan would fall apart – she had assumed that Ammu would never admit to her relationship with Velutha. She had forgotten about Ammu's "Unsafe Edge." Baby Kochamma knew that she must get Ammu out of Ayemenem, so she preyed on Chacko's grief and managed to portray Ammu and the twins as the cause of Sophie Mol's death. Because of this it was really Baby Kochamma's fault that Chacko broke down Ammu's door and kicked her out, and that Estha was "Returned."

*Baby Kochamma basically becomes the story's villain as she destroys many lives to try and save the family "honor" and her own reputation. Even Chacko is mostly innocent, as his grief was so great that it was easy for Baby Kochamma to persuade him to kick Ammu out. The parts of the story revealed at the beginning finally fall into place, and we see that Velutha was already dead when Ammu went to the police station.*

## CHAPTER 20: THE MADRAS MAIL

The story then moves to the day Estha is sent away on the train to Madras. Estha looks out the window of the train at Ammu and Rahel. The twins won't realize until years later Ammu's role in "loving a man to death" – for now they assume Velutha's fate was all their fault. Ammu promises Estha that she will get him as soon as she finds a job, and Estha, panicked, says that will be "never." Because he says this word then, he will later blame himself when it comes true.

*In this chapter Roy juxtaposes the twins' separation in 1969 with the true scene of their "reunion" in 1993. It seems that hardly anyone knew the whole scope of the tragedy until years later, as the twins didn't even realize that Ammu had loved Velutha. Again it is a single word that carries the weight of the world for Estha.*

Meanwhile Ammu promises that she will see Estha soon, and she, Rahel, and Estha begin describing their dream house, and a school where the punishments fit the crimes – not like punishments "you spent your whole life in." The train starts to move and Estha and Rahel both scream as they are separated.

*Just as Rahel wanted Ammu to punish her instead of "loving her less," so now the twins long for a concrete punishment that could fix the situation instead of just haunting their whole lives. When the twins are separated they seem to feel physical pain.*

Twenty-three years later, the twins lie down together on Estha's bed in silence. Then they have sex, once again breaking the "Love Laws," "Quietness" and "Emptiness" (Estha and Rahel) naturally coming together in an expression of grief, not joy.

*This controversial scene shows how there is no true healing for such grief as the twins have experienced. They can only come back together in this way, reaffirming their closeness and love through another taboo act, though the novel suggests that it is only through love, and not the strict enforcement of prejudicial rules or taboos, that peace and togetherness can be found.*

The narrative then moves back to 1969, the night that Sophie Mol arrives in Ayemenem. Ammu puts the twins to bed early, but they can tell she isn't angry with them anymore. Ammu then stands in the dark bedroom, reluctant to go back to the loud conversation and adoration of Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma. She remembers her dream of the "God of Small Things," and she longs for him.

*This is the same day that the twins feared Ammu was angry and would stop loving them, so at least they had a small reconciliation that night. Ammu's forbidden relationship begins the day Sophie Mol arrives – the world of Ayemenem is overturned in just two short weeks.*

## CHAPTER 21: THE COST OF LIVING

Later that night Ammu feels restless, and she goes out onto the porch and listens to the radio in the dark. An English song comes on about losing your dreams, and Ammu suddenly gets up and walks "out of her world like a witch." She runs sobbing to the banks of the Meenachal River, hoping that Velutha will be there, but at first it seems he isn't.

*When first describing Ammu, the narrator said that certain songs brought out her "Unsafe Edge," and here Ammu seems inspired by the radio to change her life and future. She and Velutha share a mysterious connection here, just like the twins do.*

Meanwhile Velutha is floating in the river, thinking about Ammu. He sees her and, as if accepting his eventual fate, swims slowly towards her. Ammu finally sees him and admires him as he emerges from the river. She goes to him and kisses him, and though Velutha thinks about how he could lose everything over this, he relents. They have sex there by the river, in the spot where Estha found the old boat – as if the twins had prepared this ground for them.

*Roy ends the novel with these scenes of love, contrasting them with the violence and tragedy that seem so powerful and are borne of efforts to preserve or gain power and position. Roy is saying that although they are small and ephemeral, these moments of love are just as important as lifelong trauma or the upheaval of a nation.*

Afterward Ammu both laughs and cries, and she feels safe in Velutha's arms despite the danger of their situation. For the thirteen nights after that, when Ammu and Velutha keep meeting by the river, they only discuss the "Small Things." They notice their ant bites, and the little spider who lives in the History House, and they relate his whims to the fragility of their own fate. At the end of every night they only promise each other "tomorrow," as they cannot look any farther, and they know that "things can change in a day."

*We have seen all the horrors that came about because of this relationship, but Roy ends the novel on a hopeful note as Ammu and Velutha look no farther than tomorrow, and focus only on the small things and their immediate love for each other. Even the sad years following 1923 are still made up only of small things and "tomorrows," and perhaps the reunited twins will also find some hope in each other and the wonders of the present.*

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